

The Landscape for Change

**An examination of the strengths,
weaknesses, threats and opportunities
of Washington libraries**

**Prepared for the Washington State Library by Consensus
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Table of Contents

The national landscape		3
Social and economic issues	4	
Library services and staff	8	
Washington strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities		13
Strengths	14	
Weaknesses	23	
Threats	30	
Opportunities	39	
The most important result of a shared vision	47	
Survey of staff members and the public		51
Public survey	53	
Staff survey	58	
Appendix A: Interview subjects		66
Appendix B: Washington State Library and Consensus		68
Appendix C: Bibliography and endnotes		69

The National Landscape

Change happens in two ways. There is change that happens to us and change that we create ourselves. Guided by the Washington State Library, the libraries of Washington State are in the process of creating a plan that will direct their work and the use of federal Library Services and Technology Act funds over the next five years. The reality is that the plan will be affected by changes imposed from outside, over which libraries have little control. But we also know that libraries can define the changes that they wish to create, and move towards a shared vision of the future.

This report begins that process. It offers a picture of the landscape, both national and statewide, within which Washington libraries do their important work. It synthesizes national research, offers key facts particular to Washington State, and presents the results of primary research, including a focus group with the Library Council of Washington, telephone interviews with 31 persons involved in Washington libraries, and an online survey that was completed by 283 customers and 340 staff members.

Research identifies trends around the U.S.

Libraries have been the focus of extensive national research in the last five years. IMLS (the Institute for Museums and Libraries), OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), Public Agenda in conjunction with Americans for Libraries Council and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, ULC (the Urban Libraries Council), and the Pew Trust, among others, have invested dollars in investigating topics affecting libraries. All these studies were reviewed as part of this research. (See Appendix C for a bibliography.) Each added value to our understanding of libraries. Two in particular, the *2005 OCLC Scan* and *Long Overdue* from the Americans for Libraries Council, seem the most significant for understanding today's library and for future planning.

In addition to the studies, professional journals including *American Libraries* and *Library Journal*, were scanned for relevance. And further information was sought through email conversations with library leaders including:

- James G. Neal, vice president for information services and university librarian, Columbia University;
- Terri Kirk, a Paducah, Kentucky, high school librarian and active member of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and a member of the American Library Association's Executive Board;
- Mary Kay Chelton, associate professor, Graduate School of Library and Informa-

tion Studies, Queens College; and

- Carolyn Sosnowski, information specialist, the Special Library Association.

Each of these individuals generously provided links to important data to help with the understanding of current issues and future trends.

Core services, yesterday and today

To a great extent our view of the modern library and its core services was set in the latter part of the 19th Century. Those services included:

- Quiet place for study, research, and reading;
- Collections of books – both circulating and reference;
- Collections of current and retrospective newspapers and magazines; and
- Knowledgeable librarians.

These “core” services are still considered important in the modern library. Over time, they changed along with new technology, some of which is now very old technology.

Additional services added in the last century include:

- Age-specific services;
- Paperback books;
- 16 mm films;
- Videos;
- DVDs;
- Internet access;
- Digitized resources;
- Phonograph records;
- Cassettes;
- CDs;
- Exhibits;
- Meeting spaces;
- Study areas;
- Computers;
- Internet access;
- Wireless connectivity;
- Community information; 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
- The funding of libraries

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- The disconnect between patron expectations and what libraries provide
 - The advocacy and marketing of libraries
 - The issues of privacy and confidentiality
 - The legal actions and controversies

Library services and staff issues

- The globalization of libraries and information
- The Google-ization of information
- The changes in use of library services
- The graying of the workforce
- The outsourcing of library services
- The place of the reference librarian
- The place in the spectrum of academic and school libraries

Social and economic issues

The library as space

“Social networking” is not just a concept of the digital world. Where time spent at the library was once considered a solitary activity of reading and research, today’s libraries – including public, school and academic – are being reconfigured as gathering spaces for people. In England, the word “library” is even disappearing from the vocabulary and is being replaced by “idea stores complete with café, crèches and multi media offerings.” Amenities include Internet terminals, sight-and-sound stalls and children’s play areas as well as books. Overall, it has become a place to interact with your neighbors.¹ In Washington State, The Seattle Public Library has garnered world-wide attention for the design of the central library and the re-thinking of how space is used.

The newer libraries are being designed with more space for people and technology and less space for books. Older libraries are being redesigned around the same concepts with books being relegated to upper floors, back areas, compact or warehouse-like storage. The new approach includes coffee bars, changing rules about noise, food and drink, flexible furniture, small group study spaces and more.

Current examples of new construction include the three-year-old Salt Lake City Public Library, which sees its role as “the center of town, the community gathering place” and “a place where people interact with material and each other,”² the recently opened Valparaiso University Library,³ and the reconfigured space at the University of Massachusetts.⁴ Even school libraries are being affected. The new Hobart High School library, slated to open in 2009⁵, was totally designed around how teens actually use libraries with “relaxed, flexible spaces, comfortable seating, spaces for quiet reading and for shared learning, and spaces for computers.”

Libraries must plan for both library-owned computer equipment and laptops owned

by users. The laptop owners want both access to electricity to run their laptops and WiFi access to the internet.

And books are taking a secondary role in the design of academic and high school libraries. In describing the new library at Valparaiso University, the *Wall Street Journal* made note that students who once avoided the library are now “flocking to the new library - the \$33 million Christopher Center. The four-story blend of metal, glass, concrete and brick is twice as big as the old library but has 80,000 fewer books. About one-fifth of them are kept in a vault students can't enter. Robotic arms retrieve them in 15 seconds after a request is made online. Threatened with irrelevance, the college library is being reinvented - and books are being de-emphasized.”⁶

The funding of libraries

Although the November elections brought positive results for public libraries with bond issues on the table, several funding issues continue.

School librarians are still not considered essential members of the learning team in many localities and were not mentioned in the original “No Child Left Behind” legislation. That presents a challenge when it comes to funding school libraries. In Washington State, for example, the Federal Way School District greatly reduced staffing at its school libraries in response to budgetary concerns.

Academic libraries and special libraries must compete with other departments for funding within their institutions.

Public libraries struggle with increased costs for digital resources balanced against a continued demand for print materials. New construction is often questioned. Libraries that have been able to acquire new spaces have sometimes suffered a reduction in their operating budgets.

School board budgets rarely provide enough dollars to purchase books and other materials for students in spite of accreditation requirements for up-to-date books. One example of this was reported in the Belleville, Illinois, newspaper where the region “ranks far below state and national spending for school libraries.” Kay Maynard, executive secretary of the Illinois School Library Media Association, was interviewed for the article. She noted a similar trend for flat or reduced funding for other schools in the state. “‘Particularly as the economy has ailed in the past few years, school funding has gone down or at least not increased,’ she said, and a library’s book budget seems an easy place to cut.”⁷

At the September Unconference sponsored by *Library Journal*⁸, library directors asked “How do I pay for technology without additional staff, time, or money?” The younger librarians at the session asked, “How do I learn new technology?” Both questions

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 special library

have funding implications. “The two groups also shared an overarching sentiment that libraries should be relevant to users.”

The disconnect between patron expectations and what libraries provide

Information consumers are used to logging on and calling up information. Survey results from the *2005 OCLC Scan* demonstrate that information consumers want their answers fast. They rely on information that can be sought through a quick Internet search using a search engine.

What often concerns librarians is that they pay little attention to the authenticity of a source. When they do need to authenticate that source they tend to check other sources on the web or check with a friend or acquaintance. They do not necessarily check with a library, librarian or even library catalog.

In addition, the electronic catalog, which somewhat replicates the concept of the old physical catalog with Boolean logic and keyword searching an added feature, does not capture content as efficiently as search engines.⁹

Advocacy for and marketing of libraries

Several of the reports discuss the difficulties libraries have in making the public aware of services other than the traditional ones. The *2005 OCLC Scan*, for example, noted that those surveyed were mostly aware of libraries and librarians, and people with library cards used libraries even if they tended to use them once a month or less. Awareness of databases and other electronic resources were much less well known and while there is respect for librarians, there is also a tendency not to turn to them as a source of information.

This trend is particularly frustrating to librarians who are concerned that information seekers are missing the best resources available. For example, in response to the re-configuration at the University of Massachusetts, which cleared the first few floors of books, the librarians established a regular “the doctor is in” feature in hopes of highlighting the rich book collection on the upper floors for students.¹⁰

Issues of privacy and confidentiality

Librarians around the U.S. were very concerned about the ramifications of the Patriot Act, which did away with due process protection in National Security Letters, and fought hard along with the ACLU to test its legality in court and to let it expire.

Last January, the FBI and Newton, Massachusetts, police were involved in a tense standoff with Newton Free Library Director Kathy Glick-Weil. She refused to allow law enforcement access to library computers without a court-issued warrant during an investigation into an imminent terrorist threat targeting Brandeis University.¹¹ This fall, a library director in New Jersey resigned instead of accepting a disciplinary action for following a state law that requires law enforcement to seek a search warrant before releasing customer information.¹²

Most states have laws covering the privacy and confidentiality of library records. These laws have been questioned by lawmakers in several states, including Wisconsin, as they relate to minors. A December 21, 2006, American Library Association press release argues with a response to the Senate from FBI director Robert S. Mueller III, who appeared to have ignored specific direction from the senate that libraries were no longer to be included in National Security Letter requests.¹³

The legal actions and controversies

American Libraries Online regularly reports on legal issues and controversies that arise over books, Internet access, social networking, and service entitlement. Although there had been discussion of bringing it forward, the post-election Senate session did not attempt to bring forth DOPA (deleting online predators) legislation passed last summer by the House. DOPA “would have would have required all schools and libraries that receive federal Internet subsidies to block youth access to interactive

online services, particularly online social networks and chat rooms.”¹⁴ There were two very relevant cases in Massachusetts¹⁵ and Michigan.¹⁶ The Massachusetts case revolved around whether homeless individuals would be issued library cards. The Michigan case resulted when a library district refused to provide a library card to a non-resident.

“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 large public library

Library services and staff

The globalization of libraries and information

Those seeking knowledge no longer need to rely only on resources housed at a physical library. Several studies pointed out that most information seekers begin with an Internet search. As libraries have made more information, including their catalogs, available on their websites, the use of libraries is no longer restricted to those with physical access. The Kansas City Public Library, for example, has noted that hits on its homepage now more than rival the annual circulation and, in fact, exceeds that figure by 107%.¹⁷ That phenomenon is not unique to this library. As more and more information becomes available through the Internet, those using the information are not necessarily the ones who paid to have it created in that format or who support its ongoing availability.

The Google-ization of information

Who owns the information and who has access is an important future consideration. “According to Google, we are only a few years away from having the entire collections of large research libraries completely digitized and searchable.” In some cases the entire text of scarce and out-of-print books will become available in an electronic format. In others

only “snippets” will display because of copyright issues.¹⁸

A Google Book Search FAQ lists the libraries with contracts. They include the University of Michigan, Harvard University, Stanford University, The New York Public Library, Oxford University, the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the University of Virginia, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of California. As part of the contract, each library receives a digital copy of each of their titles.¹⁹

But Google is not the only show in town. Project Gutenberg, a volunteer project, is the oldest digital library. The project focuses on public domain titles.²⁰ Project Gutenberg titles are easily accessed on the web and one company, NetLibrary, has included MARC records for the titles as part of their e-book lease packages. According to the Project Gutenberg website, 20,000 titles are now available. Microsoft and Cornell announced a digitizing project at about the same time that Google made its big announcement.

A third group, OCA (Open Content Alliance), is a collaborative effort of a number of organizations including Yahoo and the Internet Archive. They recently announced a \$1 million grant to help pay for digital copies of collections owned by the Boston Public Library, the Getty Research Institute and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. According to a press release, the works include the personal library of John Adams, the nation's second president, images from the Metropolitan Museum, a collection of anti-slavery material from the John Hopkins University Libraries and Gold Rush documents housed at the University of California-Berkeley. OCA intends to “build a permanent archive of multilingual digitized text and multimedia content.”²¹

And Google has other competition at least for the newest titles with publishers and online bookstores selling access. Google's edge will probably be the number of universities with extensive stored collections who are giving Google access. According to Roy Tennant, in a *Library Journal* article, this mass digitization effort will “make a serious mark and will create unforeseen impacts and enable unpredicted kinds of interactions with books. Whatever the outcome, libraries will be affected. We just don't know exactly how yet.”²²

OCLC is working on making ownership information easily available through links to WorldCat, a database reflecting the collections of libraries worldwide. This access will be especially helpful when only the snippet of a title is available or access to the print version is important. The University of Michigan (UM) is the first library participating in the Google Library project to include this information. UMBooks allows users to search for books that have been scanned by Google and other content digitized by the UM libraries. Once users get to a specific digitized title, they can search within that item.²³

The changes in the use of library services

Increased digital access to books will affect libraries in the future. Some of the ways in which libraries will be affected include a real potential for cooperative collection building for academic, special and large public libraries, a possible increased reliance on inter-library loan services, and either a reduced or expanded need for storage for titles that are

rarely used, depending on the institution.

Digitizing collections also opens up special collections to a much wider audience according to Clifford Lynch.²⁴ And there is also the likelihood of an increased acceptance of books in digital format and easier print access to rare and out-of-print works through affordable instant print technology like The Expresso, an affordable printing machine that “can print, align, mill, glue and bind two books simultaneously in less than seven minutes, including full-color laminated covers. It prints in any language and will even accommodate right-to-left texts by putting the spine on the right.”²⁵

How the cost of technology affects a library’s ability to purchase print resources is another service change. At a minimum, acquiring both is a budget/cost balancing issue. Technology, especially in the form of digitized information, is costly. Yet survey responses for the 2005 OCLC Scan show that these resources are underutilized by a public that is not familiar with them.²⁶ And a 2005 ARL report on the spending trends of academic libraries shows “an increasing portion of these expenditures devoted to electronic resources (30% of the library materials budget as of the latest count).” The report further states that “libraries appear to be catering to their users’ never-ending lust for delivery of information to the desktop. Issues related to the quality of the electronic content purchased or licensed by libraries, its long-term preservation, and the sustainability of these spending patterns are major challenges facing research libraries for the foreseeable future.”²⁷

While they are designing around similar service needs for space and technology, public libraries are also evaluating their potential as the community’s “Third Place” so named by Ray Oldenberg in his book *The Great Good Place*. Or looking at a role as community activity as discussed in Robert Putnam’s *Better Together* and ULC’s report *Engaged Libraries*, both of which highlighted some of the best community-involved branches in the Chicago system.

The Public Library Association is drafting new service roles for public libraries as part of their planning process and a soon-to-be-released study from ULC identifies the potential for public libraries as a force in economic development. The four areas the study identified are:

- Early literacy and adult literacy;
- Workforce skills;
- Entrepreneurship and small business development; and
- Catalyst for economic development.

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 large public library

The graying of the workforce

The future of librarianship is of concern to all types of libraries. Librarians are looking to a current two-year study undertaken by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) that will assess the retirement issue facing the profession and provide direction on the skills that will be needed.

With a high percentage of currently employed librarians in the baby boomer generation, there is concern in the profession both about who will replace the boomers and whether the replacements will be MLS librarians. At the Thinking Ahead Conference, ALA President Leslie Burger discussed a possible alternative to the MLS, while OCLC's George Needham recommended a complete overhaul of the way we educate librarians.²⁸ The IMLS workforce study is seen as an important piece of research by librarians, who hope that the results of the study will measure up to the anticipation that has built around it. Included in the study is the identification of the 21st century skills that will be needed in libraries.

The outsourcing of library services

Outsourcing of library services, which has ranged from acquisitions and technical services to the entire operation of the library, is also of concern in the library profession. Data about outsourcing has been included in the IMLS survey, *A National Study on the Future of Librarians in the Workforce*.

The place of reference services

The ability to quickly find information on the Internet has people turning away from traditional librarians and reference services. One of the IMLS workforce study questions specifically asks about reference statistics. At the University of Massachusetts, concern on the part of the reference librarians over students only turning to electronic resources has caused the librarians to establish a regular "the doctor is in" setup to introduce students to print resources of which they are unaware.²⁹

The place in the spectrum of academic and school libraries

The academic community grapples with some of the same issues as the public library, with a few differences unique to their role in higher education. The top issues for academic librarians were first articulated in 2002 and are still relevant four years later:

- Recruitment, education, and retention of librarians (IMLS Workforce Study). This is also a top issue mentioned by the Special Library Association.
- Role of the library in the academic enterprise.
- Impact of information technology on library services.
- Creation, control, and preservation of digital resources.
- Chaos in scholarly communication.
- Support of new users.
- Higher education funding.³⁰

At *School Library Journal's* first annual "Leadership Summit: Empowering Leaders, Advancing the Profession," in 2005, the 200 attendees included librarians, teachers, administrators, reading researchers, and federal and state education officials. They divided into three brainstorming focus groups to deal with the issues of literacy, student achievement and 21st century learning skills. Some of the issues identified were barriers to working together, the lack of a common language that puts the learner first, making librarianship relevant in these changing times, building the role around student achievement and literacy rather than information-literacy skills, and better collaboration with all educational groups.

As Ross Todd of Rutgers University's School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies said, "It's not just about test scores. It's about creating a wider understanding of what school librarians do, and cross-pollinating with other professional groups."³¹

Of concern to school librarians, according to the AASL website, is the decision this fall by District 66 in Omaha, Nebraska, to give all 2000 of its students laptops with access to databases owned by the school district and the local public library. The move replaced school libraries and librarians in the district.³²

Washington Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats & Opportunities

Before building a road or planning a new town, it's important to survey the terrain, to know where the land is working with you and where it's working against you. That way, rather than fighting the way things are, it's possible to turn current reality to your advantage. This strategic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Washington State Library and of Washington libraries also covers the major challenges and opportunities they face.

The assessment includes information from four sources. The first is information drawn from federal and state sources in print, along with clarifying interviews with key state and national sources. The second is drawn from a brainstorming session with members of the Library Council of Washington, which was conducted in November of 2006. The third includes the results of interviews with 31 library leaders and stakeholders statewide, conducted in November and December of 2006. The fourth is data from an online survey that drew 283 public responses and 340 staff responses.

An overview

Prior to the merger with the Office of the Secretary of State, the Washington State Library was an independent agency governed by the Washington State Library Commission, which was appointed by the Governor. The Washington State Library (WSL) is designated to assist libraries and to ensure that residents of the entire state have access to library services. State library staff members work in partnership with statewide advisory committees to plan and implement programs, provide training, grants, and consulting services for all public and non-profit libraries in the state.

Responsibility for public library development and the Washington State Library was transferred to the Office of the Secretary of State in 2002. State responsibility for school library media centers is found in the Office of the State Superintendent. There is no higher education coordinating body for academic libraries.

It would be hard to miss the fundamental changes that have swept through public, school, academic, and special libraries in the past decade. The Internet and the Web have, as we say, changed everything.

A recent study of state library agencies³³ notes that 39 states have standards for public libraries (Washington is not one of them), but no states have standards for virtual branches. Library leaders have tried for nearly a decade to get a better handle on electronic resources in libraries of all sorts. John Bertot and Charles McClure have been at the forefront of this effort.³⁴ They call for and begin to define "Successfully Networked Public Li-

braries.” The initiative is widely seen in the library community as beginning to define what it takes for libraries to be relevant to the information needs of the public in the new era of the Internet and electronic resources.

Strengths

Washington State Library

In recent years, other state library agencies have had to rely increasingly on federal LSTA funds for basic state library agency operations, which has not been the case with WSL, although it has lost a substantial portion of its state funding. The online survey for the 5-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 non-profit libraries in the state. WSL subsidizes 50% of the license using federal LSTA funds.

In 2002, as Washington state government faced a \$1.2 billion shortfall, the governor proposed eliminating the Washington State Library, which at that time received about \$9 million in state funds. The legislature saved WSL by moving it to the secretary of state’s office, although the library was hit with a 23% spending reduction. In 2003, legislators approved a state library budget of about \$5 million, which was \$2.7 million more than proposed by the governor. Because of the state legislative action, the state library was forced to eliminate specialized services to the legislature and state agencies, but was able to continue to serve the public. The WSL 2006 budget, not including federal LSTA funding, was nearly \$6 million, about 65% of the library’s budget prior to 2002.

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.

WSL has been using LSTA money to encourage the development of virtual reference services on a distributed scale for the last several years. WSL is moving into a coordinating role, helping the library community to further explore issues around working together.

Libraries in Washington State

A review of library data identified the strengths along with some weaknesses of libraries in

“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 teacher-librarian

Washington State.

- Circulation of public library materials continues to climb, but answers to reference questions appear to have stalled in 1999 and then declined. That decline corresponds very well with the widespread use of the Internet and Google for answering easy questions, leaving the harder questions for reference staff.
- State laws governing public libraries in Washington allow municipal and special district libraries. Washington has far fewer libraries than most other states and those libraries include wider units of service, which generally produces more efficient and, often, more proficient libraries. Washington has 14 library districts that serve populations of 100,000 or more.
- Most academic library data fit the national picture fairly well.
- There are more than 140 special libraries in Washington. Data for special library funding and use is not available because it is proprietary, but anecdotal evidence from the Special Libraries Association tells us that the Internet and Web, along with constant pressure to deliver on the bottom line, have had immense effects on special and government libraries in the U.S. Washington libraries are unlikely to be an exception to this trend.
- In the last five years, 20 states have conducted major studies on the impact of school library media programs on student achievement and have found that good library media services and staffing equal enhanced student performance. Benchmarks on such items as staffing levels, materials spending, and library open hours are missing in Washington, as in most states. Test scores rise in both elementary and middle schools as library media specialists and teachers work together. Scores increase with the amount of time library media specialists spend as in-service trainers of other teachers, acquainting them with the rapidly changing world of information.

Strengths of libraries in the state as identified by the Library Council of Washington

In November 2006, Consensus met with the Library Council of Washington (LCW) to ask group members how they saw the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for Washington libraries. LCW identified the following strengths:

- Libraries throughout the state have defined their role(s) broadly.
- Traditional library services are well used.

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- Electronic resources are heavily used.
 - Libraries tend to be favorably viewed by the general public and strongly supported by customers.
 - There is an emerging trend of better multi-type library cooperation.
 - There is some practice of resource sharing and a desire to expand the practice.
 - Collections (print, audio-visual and electronic) are extensive.
 - There is an accredited library school within the state.
 - There is statewide pricing of some electronic resources.
 - There are effective library leaders in all segments of the library community.
 - Library legislation (at least for public libraries) allows for direct taxation.
 - The number of public library administrative units has been kept to a minimum.

Strengths identified in interviews with library leaders statewide

A SWOT analysis can provide a rigorous look at the internal and external landscape, or it can be just a long list of attributes that adds little value. The key is to determine what an entity does better or worse than its competition. “Good” makes no difference if the competition does it better, and “bad” isn’t such a problem if competitors are worse. So we began by asking interview subjects to tell us what their libraries do better and worse than their competitors.

Many took the opportunity to tell us what they consider to be competitors for the time and resources of their library customers. In general, interview subjects agreed that the following are competitors:

- Internet search engines like Google (although one subject said that Google is a resource rather than competition);
- Big-box bookstores like Barnes & Noble and Borders;
- Quiet coffee shops like Starbucks;
- Television;
- Movies and services like Netflix;
- For teenagers, the gaming industry;
- For children, for-profit preschool activities like Gymboree;
- For both children and teens, time-consuming extracurricular activities like sports;
- Specialized online resources such as audible.com and scientific websites; and
- For one special library, other internal groups that perform similar functions.

The size of the library and, often, the income level of the customers served had a strong impact on who is viewed as competition. Leaders in small libraries, particularly those in lower-income or rural communities, said that none of the usual suspects were competitors. “We deliver the Internet for a lot of our customers, so the library is a partner with them in

getting online,” one said. Another noted that the nearest public library was 18 miles away from her special library, and that isolation reduced competition.

One director of a large library questioned whether any of the typical competitors could steal customers if libraries were strong advocates and marketed themselves well. “We have seen a 50% increase in borrowing in the last four years and we’ve seen a 20% increase in physical door counts, and this year we’ll have more than 4.5 million visitors to our virtual library,” the director said.

What does your library do better than the competition?

The four strengths mentioned most often were the information provided, the library as place, customer service, and services tailored to the community and niche markets. Children and youth services, information literacy training, bridging the digital divide, and traditional library services available to everyone occupied the midrange. Least often mentioned were statewide activities like collaboration and networking, marketing, cost-effectiveness, and attracting resources.

While some responses were specific to a particular type of library or its patrons, for the most part the responses from each group of interview subjects were spread across all categories. Each person could mention an unlimited number of strengths. The average was about three per interview subject.

Summary - “What does your library do better than its competitors?”

26	Information – accurate and unique information
17	Library as place, at the center of the community
14	Customer service
11	Services tailored to the market or to niche markets
9	Children and youth services
8	Training in information literacy
5	Services that bridge the digital divide
5	Services for everyone – traditional library services
3	Statewide activities, like collaboration and networking
2	Marketing
2	Cost-effectiveness
1	Attracting new and emerging resources

Accurate and unique information

Of the 102 strengths mentioned, 26 related to the information provided by libraries.

Ten said that libraries provide accurate and complete information on a variety of subjects. Most cited their online resources and said that Google can’t provide full-text articles or guarantee that the information is from reliable sources. “Libraries provide credible information better than anyone else. You can trust a librarian. You can’t really trust the in-

formation you can get on Google,” one person said. A subject from a small public library said, “I just talked with someone who’s doing a doctoral thesis and has the most up-to-date web stuff at home. He was delighted to see that the database subscriptions were available.”

Seven said that libraries provide access to unique materials. Several cited the concept of the long tail. Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired*, writes in *The Long Tail* that the “short head” of hits can be rivaled or exceeded collectively by the “long tail” of niche products that are in low demand or that have low sales volume, if the store or distribution channel is large enough.³⁵ Online retailers like Amazon or iTunes can stock almost everything and, according to Anderson, “When consumers are offered infinite choice, the true shape of demand is revealed. And it turns out to be less hit-centric than we thought.”³⁶

A subject from a large public library said, “Most organizations focus on the most popular things to sell and that’s how they make their money. Then there’s a long tail of diminishing returns for other things. We are the masters of the long tail; we provide hundreds of thousands of books no longer in print.”

Some noted that they see what’s offered elsewhere and then try not to duplicate. Others cited their library’s strengths in the management and preservation of special collections. One special library director said, “To duplicate from one high-grade format to videotape can cost up to \$700 per tape, so we have to have good archival controls in place to preserve the tape, make sure the digital components are cross referenced, and to ensure that the digital content is backed up several different ways and retrievable over a long period of time.”

Five comments dealt with reference services available at libraries. “We perform the best research and retrieval services of our competitors,” said a special library representative. A teacher-librarian said, “We do a reference interview with everybody, so we can match exactly with what kids need.”

Library as place

When people talked about what happens within the library building, they used words like welcoming, neutral and safe. When they talk about the library as a place within a community, they talk about it as the community’s center.

Eight said a strength was providing a physical space where people can gather. Several referred to the library as a “Third Place” – that place after home and work where people congregate. “We do better than anyone else in providing the sense of home that people feel in the library,” said a subject with a large public library. Another said that libraries were physical assets to their communities, with meeting rooms

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 large public library

and support. Two mentioned that people can come together at the library and talk about ideas.

Five comments dealt with the library as a neutral, safe place to learn. An academic library representative said that many students were low-income, living with their families or with families of their own. “Not only do they not have quiet, but they don’t have their own corner for a study space.” A teacher-librarian said that her library functioned like a workshop. “It’s their center of learning and it’s a busy, noisy place.” A representative from the Washington State Library / Office of the Secretary of State also mentioned the library as a neutral space for exploring ideas. “That’s the case even in our institutional libraries, like at the state penitentiary and mental institution. That’s something that means a lot to the customers there, I’ve learned from talking with them.”

Three said that their libraries serve as the centers of their communities. Representatives from two large public libraries talked about taking an active role to assure that branch libraries serve as centers of the community. One is working with new towns as part of the planning process to create town centers. “We need to become the center of the community, and I don’t know that we’ve done that in the past.”

Customer service

Representatives of larger institutions tended to talk about being friendly and helpful, while smaller institutions talked about personal relationships with customers. Three subjects cited customer services that are specific to the circumstances of their particular libraries.

Eight persons said their library was best at friendly, helpful customer service. “We surveyed students and found that they felt the friendly service was really important,” a teacher-librarian said. A large public library representative said, “We’ve always been praised for our librarians and front-line people, and how helpful they are.”

Three said that having personal relationships with customers was a strength. “Somebody was looking for health information. I knew her well, so I could be a little more sensitive in how I gave the information to her,” someone with a small public library said. A leader of a special library said, “They assume we understand about military lifestyles. We know how to address them correctly...and we are more attuned to the problems of our community.”

The director of a large public library cited home delivery as an important service the library provides. Using the postal service as a delivery service is more cost-effective than bookmobiles in serving a huge geographic area. The library pays for postage to and from the customer.

A volunteer leader with a special library talked about the importance of having staff members that reflect the community served. “Most libraries for the blind don’t have blind staff, but we have two blind reader advisors. 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.”

The director of another special library talked about providing specialized customer service due to the library's role in the producing much of the content it handles. "There's a lot of very in-depth hand-holding and a lot more breadth and depth to the services we provide in all areas of access and acquisition."

Services tailored to the market or to niche markets

Seven subjects said that their library was better than competitors at tailoring services to their customer base. One public library representative mentioned this as a strength, while three special and two school library representatives did, along with a representative of other constituents. This was the category in which people were most likely to talk in terms of being relevant to their communities. Lack of relevance was a theme when people talked about threats to their libraries.

The "other constituents" interview subject said that being customer-centered was key to the library of the future. "Many libraries, using Planning for Results, are getting a much greater understanding of that. The library of the past assumed it knew and didn't ask questions, and the library of the future communicates with its customers." One example is the public library whose print and database collections were built around customer requests. The library's representative said, "This is a very subtle difference between saying what you think people need and asking people what they want. People were invested because they asked for it." A special library representative, operating on a very limited budget, conducts surveys annually as well as noting when patrons need something specific, and tries to meet their needs.

Two teacher-librarians talked about the importance of knowing their students and the curriculum, and building their offerings around that. "Our collection reflects the curriculum and the kind of learning that kids are doing," one said.

Two special library representatives focused on offering materials and services targeted to users' specific needs. The Washington Talking Book & Braille Library, for example, provides unabridged audio books, tape players, tapes labeled in Braille, and children's books in both print and Braille so that parents can work with their children. Another special library is organized around technical services projects and archival and retrieval for users who include media production people and corporate users.

Four subjects cited their libraries' ability to develop niche markets, including outreach to people for whom English is a second language. Two of the four represent large public libraries, one is with a supporting organization and another with an educational institution.

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

A subject with a large public library cited the library's services to nonprofits. "We have a nonprofit center where we provide a wide array of databases and print materials to assist nonprofits. Nobody provides nonprofit informational support better than we do." Another said, "We're the only library with a full-time Spanish-speaking outreach person. She goes to Head Starts, day-care centers and migrant programs and does Every Child Ready to Read."

Children and youth services

Four subjects said that early learning for children was a strength of their libraries. Two examples: "All of our staff members are trained to do story time, and that includes incorporating Every Child Ready to Read," said one large public library representative. A subject with a small public library cited a family art program, where parents and young children create art together at the library once a month.

Three subjects cited the ability of public libraries to complement the work of schools and school libraries. A subject with a small public library said that they provide after-school homework help through volunteer tutors.

One subject, with a large public library, said that services to teens were a strength. "In what we're doing with teens – cool spaces, book lists, and gaming events – we're not seeing a decline in teen use, we're seeing a surge where they're more engaged than ever."

Training in information literacy

While every teacher-librarian said her library was better than competitors at training people to evaluate and analyze data, training in information literacy was also mentioned by interview subjects representing public and academic libraries, and education.

One teacher librarian said, "I can provide guidance so they're not just totally blown away by the amount of information (online)." Another said that she helps students structure their research, identifying the overarching question and the probing questions. "The questioning piece stimulates the creative side of the brain, and kids are much more successful when working on that side of the brain," she said.

A subject from a medium-sized public library said that they had combined computer training with training in information literacy. "When we taught computer skills, we did it around topics they were interested in. That gave librarians the opportunity to point out which sites were best to use for the topic."

Services that bridge the digital divide

While all or almost all libraries provide computers for their customers to use, relatively few said that it was a service that set them apart from their competitors. Three library directors – from a small and medium-sized public library and an academic library – along with a subject representing support organizations and other constituents, cited bridging the digital divide as being a strength.

The representative of the medium-sized public library said that the library's commitment to providing technology began even before Gates Foundation funds were available. "We put computers in, and we're talking about a rural area that still couldn't get a high-speed Internet connection. It didn't start with Gates money, we started with tax money because we felt it was so important." At the small public library, it was wireless that made a difference. "All of the sudden, we had this whole new clientele wanting to use the wireless. They were people who had never used the library."

Services for everyone – traditional library services

Five respondents said that providing traditional library services available to everyone was a strength of their libraries. One large and three small public libraries were among the five. As one director of a small public library said, "We welcome and serve everyone, and provide free and equal access in a comfortable environment." Another said, "We have no targeted audience. It's open to everyone and has something of value for anyone in any context." The fifth respondent, with an educational institution, said that libraries level the playing field for information. "Libraries provide access to resources, networks, information for anyone, anywhere, any time. No one has that charge except for libraries."

Statewide activities, like collaboration and networking

For two representatives of the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State and one representative of a supporting organization, state-wide activities like collaboration, networking and continuing education were strengths. "There is not as much turf as I've seen in other places," said one. "There is a lot of cross-pollination. They're spending time helping people in another part of the state." Another said, "We're starting to become one library community. I see more recognition of what all library sectors do and how we might all work together."

"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 academic library

Marketing

Just two libraries – one small and one large public library – said that they were better at marketing than their competitors.

For the small public library, the secret is direct mail. The library mails a newsletter to every household in its district twice a year. Since the library began doing this ten years ago, the director said, "membership in our Friends group went from ten to more than 300. 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."

For the large public library, it's outreach. "We work with our community to engage them," the director said. "We have worked on being more visible and being a boundless library. We have no walls. We go to meetings; I consider myself a 24/7 librarian....We

market in terms of engaging and involving and communicating with the community.”

Cost-effectiveness

Two subjects, one with a small public and one with a special library, cited cost-effectiveness as a strength. The subject from the small public library said, “Netflix is a competitor, and you pay \$10 a month, whereas you’re getting all the services at my library for less than \$20 a year.”

Attracting new and emerging resources

A subject with a large public library said that attracting new and emerging resources was a strength when compared to its competitors. Four years ago, the library formed a foundation, hired a fund developer, and began holding events and making requests of individuals. “We have a 12-month program where we get sponsors from the business community, with a menu of support from \$1,000 on up, and we give them different rewards in terms of advertising, depending,” the subject said.

Weaknesses

Washington State Library³⁷

Compared to other state libraries, Washington State Library services are somewhat lacking for academic and public library services in a number of ways. WSL services to and for school libraries is in line with the efforts of most states except for this: WSL does not provide the union lists and reference referrals found in most states. Unlike many states, Washington has no state aid for public libraries or public library regional systems.

The average expenditure per capita by state library agencies is \$3.60. Roughly 83% of that is state money. In Washington the amount is \$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. The Washington State Library reports more reference, more visits, and more circulation than any other state. These numbers include services by the Washington State Library in association with correctional institutions and mental health institutions.

On average, state library agencies spend 45% of LSTA funding on grants. In Washington only 19% goes to competitive grants to libraries. The range is 0 to 100%; only

18 state library agencies spend less than WSL on grants. Instead of focusing on providing grants, at the suggestion of the Library Council of Washington, WSL has chosen to use LSTA funds to provide services available to any library in the state.

There are quite a few services that other state library agencies provide that Washington does not. (The data in the table below is based on the report of WSL as reported in *Library Agencies: Fiscal Year 2005* by Barbara Holton and Elaine Kroe for the National Center for Education Statistics, December 2006.)

There are several services that other state library agencies provide that Washington does not. For instance:

Category	States
Web-based union catalogs	49
Full-text databases	45
State standards	42
State aid to libraries	38
Statewide PR	23

Washington resource sharing is fragmented. Interlibrary loan is not coordinated for all types of libraries as it is in many states. Shared integrated library systems for multiple libraries can be found in some areas of the state, but there is much less development than can be found in other states. No statewide online catalog exists for identifying library holdings, another area in which the state lags behind many other states.

Weaknesses of libraries in the state as identified by the Library Council of Washington

- Technology upgrades not being done frequently enough, even in Microsoft's backyard and despite the generous Gates money.
- No statewide library card or program.
- Band-width penetration throughout the state is an issue that affects everyone.
- Funding does not exist to support broad-based resource sharing.
- Existing funding does not address increased cost associated with research material, especially scientific, medical, and technical journals.
- The absence of direct state aid for public libraries.
- Interlibrary loan is fragmented.
- There has been little development of shared integrated library automation systems in

any of the library sectors or regions of the state, although two-year academic libraries are working within the Orbis Cascade Alliance.

- Diversity of staff is limited.
- Too few qualified librarians available to replace existing staff as they retire.
- Absence of succession planning.
- Salaries and benefits insufficient to attract and retain critical staff.
- Inability to fund new and/or renovated buildings.
- Inability to fund necessary technology updates in a timely fashion.
- Marketing is not an integral part of library delivery.

Weaknesses identified during interviews with library leaders statewide

Marketing got twice as many mentions as its closest rival when interview subjects were asked what their library does worse than its competition. Next in line were collections, online resources, the library as physical space, and staffing. Issues with fewer mentions included computers, serving teenagers, building partnerships, attitudes in the library field, and state funding for libraries.

Interview subjects were not limited in the number of weaknesses that they could mention. On average, each person mentioned two weaknesses.

Summary – What does your library do worse than its competition?

22	Marketing and promoting what it offers
10	Collections, including items available and convenience
9	Online resources and new technology
7	Library as physical space
5	Staffing
3	Computers
3	Serving teenagers
2	Building partnerships
1	State funding for libraries

Marketing and promoting what libraries offer

About a third of the comments dealt in one way or another with marketing. We found several themes related to why libraries have difficulty with marketing and what needs to be done to improve how libraries market themselves.

According to interview subjects, librarians are used to a world in which everyone understands what the library offers and everyone is in agreement that libraries are necessary. Today, however, there is more competition for customers and tax dollars, and libraries

offer services unknown in the past. Librarians aren't used to needing to market their services and aren't comfortable with it. As one subject said, "It's partially the nature of the people who work in libraries. It's never been about promotion, ever, it's been about the service. We expect people to know our services when they walk in and we didn't really have much competition before." Another said, "It's not something librarians like to do, tooting their own horn. We need to get over that."

Marketing expertise is seen as an expense that is beyond the budgets of all but larger libraries, and few librarians have been trained in marketing. "Big libraries have marketing professionals on staff, but we can't afford to have our own," said someone with a special library. "It's a big barrier."

Three themes emerged when people talked about what libraries needed to do to market their services: *put the customer at the center; get out in the community; and reach non-users.*

Many librarians talked about the need for marketing and several mentioned community involvement when discussing other topics, but only one librarian talked about connecting with customers as an essential part of marketing. That teacher-librarian talked about her work to build advocates by making herself indispensable to her customer base: 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."

One subject noted that line staff was often much clearer than administrators about what the customers needs, what people are looking for, and how little they know regarding what the library offers. "Libraries that are successful ask the community what it needs and figure out how to deliver it to them, and they use the audience's language...(Unsuccessful libraries) want to know how to sell what they already have, (instead of asking) do I have what people want and how do I share that with them."

Another subject said that libraries need to be in tune with the community. "My impression is that some libraries operate from the inside out, figuring out what works for themselves first, rather than determining community needs."

The need for librarians to get out from behind the desk was mentioned by three interview subjects. One noted that self-check makes more librarian time available for community outreach. Another said that when every Starbucks barista understands that part of his or her job is to build brand loyalty, successful librarians "see their job as the face of the organization and strategically position the library in the community." A person involved in librarian education said, "We tell our students that if you're in this field to hide out and be behind the scenes and be introverted, you're in the wrong field. Librarians need to be out

"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 large public library

there, on the edge, public and active and even aggressive.”

Two subjects cited the need to reach out to people who don't already use the library. As one said, “Most libraries produce a newsletter and they put it in their library and wonder why their audience never grows. They don't do a good job of continually getting outside of their own four walls, virtual or otherwise.”

One person said that how libraries conduct marketing needs to change. Communications should be seen as strategic communication to key audiences rather than as publicity. “Public libraries have a horrible time prioritizing audiences. They feel as if they're not communicating the exact same information to everyone, then somehow they're not delivering on their mission. The single biggest struggle is for them to identify audiences as other than the general public. Even if you can get them to segment, they resist saying which audiences are most important to reaching their goal. That's true in terms of service delivery, but not in terms of generating traffic.”

Collections – availability and convenience

When subjects talked about physical collections like books, CDs and DVDs, they saw weaknesses in the areas of accessibility and convenience, and providing current materials, particularly bestsellers.

Accessibility and convenience were seen as weaknesses by one large public and two academic library subjects. One noted that libraries in British Columbia had found ways to display books in ways that made them easier to find “rather than hoping people can make their way through the Dewey decimal system.” Two others said that access systems were too complicated. “We've established these silos of information that we and heavy users know exist, but students can't distinguish between a journal article and a book sometimes,” one librarian said.

One teacher-librarian and two special librarians cited problems with offering current materials, and two public librarians said bestsellers were a particular problem. One, with a tribal library, noted that she has \$22,000 to spend for heat, air, electricity, phones, Internet access for 15 computers, and collections. “So I apply for the basic library grant from IMLS, \$6,000, and a good 90% goes to books, newspapers and videos.” Another subject relies on interlibrary loan to give her customers access to current fiction and DVDs, but some items aren't available that way. Bestsellers were a problem for subjects from a large and medium-size public library. As one said, “People will say, I went and bought it because I didn't want to wait two months.”

Other weaknesses mentioned were making the collections and displays attractive and providing unique multi-media resources rather than replicating what's available elsewhere.

Online resources and new technology

Echoing concerns about making physical collections more accessible, librarians said that

virtual offerings needed simplification. Nine subjects said that online resources were a weakness. Four focused on easy-to-search databases, two discussed easy reference, two talked about the need to adopt new technology, and one said the quantity of databases offered was an issue.

Four subjects said that the complexity of the online databases libraries offer was a weakness. These were mentioned by two subjects from large public libraries, one from library education and another from a support organization.

Subjects said that libraries offered a variety of databases that all had to be searched individually and that were nowhere near as easy to use as Google. “We spent the whole year teaching the branch librarians how to use our licensed databases,” one said. “The product is wonderful, but the packaging just (stinks). I’m an advocate, and I’m working with my son and we’re trying to find stuff and he says it’s boring and it’s weird and I can Google and it’s fun.”

Another said that less than 10% of the public knows that libraries offer magazine indexes like ProQuest, partly because of marketing but also because they are so hard to use. “Even librarians don’t use it, they use Google,” the subject said. “We take what ProQuest or the catalog vendor offers and assume that’s it, and we put it all side by side and people find it almost impossible to use.”

A third subject agreed that libraries need to advocate for simplified databases. “We’re not forceful enough with the vendors of library systems and purveyors of library services in saying that we need interfaces that our customers can use and would find as easy as Google. We need to say that we’re not going to buy it. Vendors think they have us over the barrel and to some extent they do. But we need to do a better job to convince them to change their search engines so that patrons can use them effectively.”

Two said that Google allowed customers to find the answers to easy reference questions, both because it was more convenient and because some libraries had limited online reference collections.

Two said that a weakness was adopting new technology. One said that libraries had not been early adopters of technology like Web 2.0, RSS feeds, blogs and podcasting. Another said that if her school library doesn’t use the new technology, it has no credibility with students. “I just purchased several MP3 players....We have calculators and digital cameras that we check out. Our sense of what a library collection is is changing.”

One teacher-librarian said that providing online resources was a challenge, both because the library plays the filtering role and because it can’t afford licenses. “My website is not the first thing they see,” she said.

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

The library as physical space

Seven comments dealt with the library as physical space. Four subjects – two each from large and small public libraries – said the hours open were a weakness, two cited providing a comfortable environment, and one cited handicapped accessibility.

Offering a lot of hours and at the right times is a weakness of libraries when compared to competitors, according to four subjects. “Our large libraries aren’t open on Sunday or that late, and the small ones are open just two or three or four days a week,” one said.

Providing a comfortable environment was a problem for one large and one small public library. The large public library representative said, “We let people come in with coffee, but that’s not the same (as having a coffeeshop), and we attract a clientele that doesn’t always make all of the other customers as comfortable.” The small public library had struggled with a minority of residents who opposed spending tax dollars on anything other than books. “Our library has become filled with bookshelves with very few open spaces where people can congregate.”

One small public library, in an historic building, was not handicapped accessible. “That’s a big problem,” the subject said.

Staffing

Five weaknesses dealt with staffing. No sub-issue was mentioned more than once. One person said that having enough staff was a weakness, as the special library hadn’t received a funding increase from the state legislature since 2001. Another said that bad budget years had led to reduced investments in staff training. A subject with a special library said it struggled with keeping up with new content, noting that “It’s a big shock for new employees to see the rapidity at which new content comes in, and it has to go back out in ten minutes with a bibliographic record and bar code.” Another special library representative said that larger libraries with more staff members were better able to provide new services. The fifth subject, from an academic library, said it was an ongoing challenge to get students to ask a librarian for help. “Once they make the first connection, they happily come back, but it’s hard for students to walk up to the reference or circulation desk and ask for help,” the librarian said.

Computers

Three subjects said that providing enough or the latest technology was a challenge. One said there was never enough computer equipment or access time available to meet demand. Two others said that providing the newest and best technology was a weakness. “Libraries are making choices between computers and books, and they don’t have the money to come up with all the things that people would like,” one subject said.

Serving teenagers

Three subjects, from large public and school libraries, said that serving teenagers was a

weakness of their library. “If we don’t know how to engage youth in accessing information we may suffer for it,” one said. Another said, “Students complain they don’t find what they need (at the public library), either. They move really fast. In middle school, I was so happy when the record got here from England four months later.”

Building partnerships

Two subjects, both from the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State, said that a weakness of libraries was building partnerships in the community. “We need to develop partnerships with other organizations and support each other, such as literacy councils and anything dealing with being ready to read or early learning,” one said. “They’ve tended to stick to themselves a lot more and that’s been a bit of a problem,” the second subject said.

State funding for libraries

One subject with the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State said that the lack of state funding for libraries was a weakness. “No money goes directly to community and regional libraries... We’ve had a number of efforts to close libraries, and it’s all a matter of funding. We’ve had county commissioners take on the library system, and it’s all about the funding. We have a number of poor rural counties and they want another patrol car, and the library is on the chopping block. Without stable state funding, that’s an issue.”

Threats

As the Washington State Library notes in its letter to Governor Gregoire’s steering committee regarding her *Washington Learns* Initiative:

Most states provide some financial support for public libraries with funding generally based on per capita served. Washington is among four or five that do not. In some states, funding is provided for support of state-level purchases of online databases. Washington is not among those states.

Washington libraries depend largely upon local taxes which have been diminished by citizen initiatives further compounding the inherent inequity in access to materials and information. Although the State Library also administers federal Library Services and Technology Act funds, these are not sufficient to support the needs of world-class learners.

The report adds: “Libraries model the report’s shift in thinking from ‘that of separate, independent preschools, middle schools, colleges and universities towards an education system

that is integrated—from birth through adulthood...”

In just 15 years, the Internet has gone from being a tool for researchers to a ubiquitous technology. In 1994, only one in ten libraries provided Internet access. By 2004, the score was virtually 100%. Still, many believe that since the Internet is now so pervasive and easy to use that the need for libraries has diminished. In coming years, libraries will be challenged with the need to respond to that perception and to “balance the books and the bytes.” Traditional library users expect print materials and reader’s advisory assistance in a comfortable environment. New users expect the library to provide high speed, wireless Internet access and the latest in technological services. Many question whether libraries are still relevant and whether the concept of library as a commons still matters. Meanwhile, there is still a sizeable digital divide; minorities and the poor have far less access to the Internet and electronic resources.

Nearly 99% of public libraries, 99% of school libraries, and 100% of academic libraries are Internet-connected, usually with dedicated, high-speed broadband Internet access. However, nearly half of all libraries report inadequate speed and nearly half report flat or reduced funding. Most library administrators believe that their maintenance and replacement cycle cannot and will not meet future needs.

The problems that libraries of all types face have been added to by the current property tax climate. In November 2001, Washington voters approved Initiative 747, which capped increases in state and local government property tax collections at 1% per year. I-747 limits the annual increase in the state and local regular property tax levies. The property tax levy limits in I-747 do not apply to voter-approved special property tax levies, such as local school district levies.

In 1996 the K20 Educational Telecommunications Network was established. The network delivers high-speed data and video access to educational institutions in Washington State. In 2001 the network was opened to public libraries and private academic libraries. US West (Qwest) court settlement money for public library Internet access runs out on June 30, 2009.

Given the environment at the federal level, with the Patriot Act and Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA), state policymakers should 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 Internet filters as a condition of state funding, along the lines of the federal CIPA law. Policymakers can expect resistance from free speech advocates. The situation is complicated by the fact that no filter companies can guarantee that their products work effectively 100% of the time. Many librarians charged that they either “over block,” blocking useful materials that is not pornographic, or “under block,” failing to block objectionable material, and usually both.

Policymakers should not expect the censorship attempts to be limited to Internet sources alone, of course. Videos, music CDs, and, of course, print materials will continue to be challenged both at the local and state levels. State library agencies and all the library

literature urge libraries to have a written and specific materials selection policy and a process for re-consideration. State laws give library boards and school boards broad discretion in discharging their duties in conformance with local community standards, but state and federal changes are continuous.

Many sources feel a divide between the I-5 corridor near Seattle and the rest of the state. This I-5 divide influences politics, Internet bandwidth, and much else. It will be a major challenge to library leaders to overcome this divide in developing library services to all state residents.

The Google Book project, Microsoft's LiveSearch Books, and Amazon all appear to have outpaced libraries in presenting bibliographic data and the full text of books to the public. The challenge for libraries will be to continue to, as the Librarian 2.0 Manifesto states: "[R]ecognize that the universe of information culture is changing fast and that libraries need to respond positively to these changes to provide resources and services that users need and want."

Threats to libraries in the State as identified by the Library Council of Washington

- Legislation and initiatives
 - I-747
 - Requirement for "super majority for some direct tax levies.
 - Requirements for tax levy lifts
 - Votes of the public directed at minimizing property taxes.
 - A climate that discourages the development of financial reserves.
- Potential instability of some (public) library tax bases.
 - City annexations
 - Incorporation of new cities, which result in withdrawal of the tax base from the library district.
- Maintaining relevance to the community.
 - There is a need for on-going assessment to determine Washington's libraries highest value to its communities.
 - There is an uneven level of knowledge regarding the level(s) of service offered by libraries in the State.
 - People tend to take libraries for granted.
 - Some people assume that the Internet, Google, Amazon, etc. address all informational needs.
- Changing demographics
 - Larger immigrant population to serve.
 - Desire to serve everyone even though expectations of different generations are substantially different.

- Changing social climate
 - Closure of mental health facilities often changes the population that frequents (primarily public) libraries.
 - Need to develop fluency in multiple languages to effectively serve.
- Information Technology (I.T.)
 - Frequent need to support multiple generations of technology simultaneously.
 - ILS vendors lag behind Google and Amazon in the services that are offered. (Customer expectation is raised beyond the library’s capability to deliver).
- Changing support for traditional library practices.
 - Different interpretation of “Fair Use” in an electronic environment.
 - LC cataloging support is diminished
 - The Patriot Act, when applied, requires most libraries to violate adopted policies.
- A culture that is rapidly changing from one of ownership to one of leasing information.
- The I-5 Divide.
- Deteriorating support of elementary and secondary school libraries.

Threats identified in interviews with library leaders statewide

The key word was “relevance” when people talked about the major threats facing their libraries. People were concerned both that libraries would become irrelevant and that they would be perceived as irrelevant; the reality and the perception were equally important.

Summary – What are three major threats facing your library?

- 35 That we are or are perceived as being irrelevant...
 - 12 ...because of the Internet
 - 5 ...to young people
 - 5 ...by not keeping up with technology
 - 4 ...by not changing
 - 3 ...by not serving important niche markets
 - 2 ...to people who don’t use the library
 - 2 ...by not talking to our customers
 - 2 ...because we can’t afford to provide important services
- 10 Inadequate funding
- 8 Not building support
- 8 Attracting enough, and the right staff
- 8 Legislative issues
- 7 Community attitudes
- 5 The changing world of information
- 3 Changes in the customer base

That we are perceived as being or are irrelevant...

Thirty-five comments related to one or another reason for a loss in relevance. Of the various reasons, by far the most often mentioned was the impact of the Internet.

Twelve subjects said that the idea that “it’s all on the Internet” was a threat. The concern cut across all categories of persons interviewed. “The Google question...has got to be taken on, head on, by the libraries and make the claim that in the library it’s very different from what happens on Google,” one said. Others said that libraries must provide simpler tools that meet people’s needs. “There is the threat that we don’t deliver on the promise of the information age. There are tremendous needs for all kinds of services, and if libraries don’t get together and deliver that in a way that meets people’s needs, that’s a threat,” according to one person. Another said that a threat was the perception that because there are electronic resources, there are no others. “In the 20th century, we added new forms of communication but the old ones didn’t go away...The fact that there is an Internet doesn’t mean everything else will go away. That hasn’t happened historically.”

The issue of the Internet was also reflected in concerns that libraries would become irrelevant to young people. *Five subjects said it was vital that libraries connect with young people, who would otherwise be unlikely to support libraries as adults. One person said, “Every kid can send instant messages to 13 people at once with a different person on the cell phone....We need to meet them on their terms. Are we doing blogs and podcasts? If we don’t meet them where they are, we’ll lose that generation.” Another said that “the fact that a lot of students say they can find everything on the Internet has a kind of sideways impact on the administration and the way they support the library.”*

Five persons also said that libraries would lose relevance if they didn’t keep up with technology. Technology burn-out was a factor, one said. “There’s a point at which people say, I’ve learned enough new stuff, or this new stuff doesn’t speak to me the way the last new stuff spoke to me, or I’m learning this new stuff and I don’t have time to learn that new stuff.” Adequate funding to keep up with technology was another issue. As one person said, “When we embraced technology and brought in computers and databases, we loaded that on top of what we already did, and as a result we’re trying to make the same amount of funding go that much further. It’s tough to keep pace. And we have to, because if we don’t we lose the game.”

Four persons said that if library staff and board members weren’t willing to change, they would lose relevance. As one said, “We have done such a good job of running our library that we have gotten bound by traditional ways of doing business.” Another said,

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 postage-paid. We’re piggybacking on the post office; they’re our delivery service. We have an 80-90% on-time return rate.”

Comment from large public library

“It’s an old-style traditional view that sees libraries as primarily a physical space, and lamenting the closing of card catalogs, and isn’t that a terrible thing.”

Three said that if libraries didn’t serve important niche markets, they would become irrelevant. “We could become irrelevant if we can’t figure out what our niches are quickly enough to make people care,” one person said. Another focused on serving immigrants, saying, “For many immigrants...their concept of libraries doesn’t even exist. Library as government institution is completely foreign....There’s distrust and there’s not a cultural reference point about what a free library is.”

Two said that not reaching out to non-users could threaten relevance. “The irrelevance to those who aren’t in the library habit is particularly a problem when trying to build support and when library issues go to a vote,” one person said.

Two said that not talking to customers could threaten relevance. One said, “If we focus too much on internals and don’t focus on people and their needs, if we don’t break out of constantly trying to improve the internal stuff, we may have great internals but they’re not being used.”

Two were concerned that funding was too low to provide services that would make libraries relevant. One teacher-librarian said, “Lots of schools get by with \$1,000 for library staffing and materials...If you want to be relevant, you have to support the curriculum and provide new materials. It’s hard to do that with such a small budget. If the library is not part of the core of the school, then you’re off the radar.”

Inadequate funding

Most interview subjects said that inadequate funding was often as much a symptom of real or perceived irrelevance as it was a threat itself. Several, however, said that the system through which libraries were funded posed a threat.

Eight said that competition for public dollars was a threat to their libraries. Public libraries can be funded in limited numbers of ways, and the property tax has its problems. The initiative process has limited how budgets can grow, and that has increased the competition for public funds. One person said, “The diminishing funds available and the problems libraries have in competing for resources with other priorities is a threat.”

Because of reduced public funds, one special library representative said, “I’m afraid they’ll close our smallest branch. That community loves its library. Because of its isolation, many don’t have access to the Internet or satellite television. They use the Internet for searching for information and use the word processor for typing letters. If that branch gets closed, they would have to travel at least 25 miles to the next library.”

Another person, with a large public library, noted that attracting more customers doesn’t necessarily bring in additional funds. “Being more popular just means you’re bursting at the seams.”

Not building support

If libraries fail to build support within their communities, they are threatened. Eight persons mentioned the need to build support. One person from a large public library said, “It used to be you didn’t have to say that much and people supported you, regardless. Now, there are so many things asking for money that people have to make conscious choices. For us, garnering community support is what we need to focus on, then the funding will come.”

Three people from special libraries said building organizational support was vital. One said that he makes the case by approaching operations like a business, using statistics and performance measures to show effectiveness and efficiency. Customer service, too, makes a difference. “If we get a vice president on the phone who needs a video clip for a presentation in an hour, we’re not going to tell him we can’t do it.”

Attracting enough and the right staff members

Eight subjects said that attracting staff was an issue, citing challenges such as offering adequate salaries, deprofessionalization of the teacher-librarian, replacing retiring librarians and attracting a diverse staff.

Two said offering adequate salaries was a threat. One person from a large public library said that big-city salaries were higher, and other libraries were at a disadvantage when trying to draw a pool of experienced applicants. The person said a promising new solution was distance learning offered through the University of Washington, “so 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.” Another person said that the private sector was a new competitor for people with skills that libraries need. “Our tech people could go to work (in the private sector) for double their salaries tomorrow.”

Two said that replacing retiring librarians was a threat. People with information skills have new options. “On staff, we have kids and old ladies. Yes, people are graduating in larger numbers, but they have more choices. You have to have mentoring programs for them immediately.” Another said that library leaders need to focus on succession planning. “A lot of leaders have been in these positions for a long time, and we need to pay attention to what comes next when these people retire, and they’ll retire around the same time.”

Two teacher-librarians said that the deprofessionalization of their profession was a threat that reduced the ability to get and keep new staff members. Several people interviewed said that they saw school libraries as the most threatened library type in Washington and nationwide. Teacher-librarians said that their position was viewed as expendable when money was tight. “They think we just need a clerical person to check out books,” one said.

“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 mid-sized public library

Another said that there is a lack of awareness of the role. “Librarians are not mentioned in teacher or administrator education programs. Most teachers have antiquated ideas about what teacher-librarians can do.”

Two people said that attracting staff members from diverse racial and ethnic groups was a threat. “Many parts of the state have more than 50% of the population that is not English speaking. Often the library doesn’t have people who speak the language of the majority of their community....(Libraries) desperately want to engage those people, but don’t have staff who speak the language. How do we recruit people for library school who reflect the diversity of the nation?”

Legislative issues

What happens in the state legislature has a profound affect on libraries around Washington. The state test for students, state funding and legislator attitudes all have an impact.

Three persons - two teacher-librarians and one from a special library – said that the Washington Assessment of Student Learning [WASL] was a threat to their libraries. Unless school libraries are written into basic education, they will be at risk, one said. “If you aren’t on the radar that says you have specific responsibilities for the WASL test, then the library becomes dispensable.” As teachers focus on the test, it has reduced library usage, another said. “Teachers are missing the connections between skills needed to write research papers and the skills they need when they take a test.” The special library representative said, “I worry that libraries will be shoved aside because they won’t be able to necessarily support all of the educational activities that are needed to support WASL. Schools are getting rid of school librarians left and right around here.”

A teacher-librarian also said that an addition to the Revised Code of Washington posed a threat, because it said that to call it a library program, it has to be staffed by a library professional. “It sets the bar higher, but doesn’t give schools any support to get to that higher level.”

Two said that the lack of state funding for libraries was a threat. One person, with a special library, said “We’re going to have to do something with our legislature to get them to understand that we need increased funding in order to keep up with the demands of the public, demands because the older blind population is increasing exponentially.”

Community attitudes

People interviewed saw two major attitudinal threats to libraries. The first was an erosion of core social values and the second was a desire to avoid paying taxes.

Four people cited an erosion of core social values as a threat. In particular, they said that citizens didn’t recognize the public good and were less willing to support the things they have in common, such as roads and bridges, public schools and public libraries. “The idea that we don’t need services that belong to everybody is a threat to libraries of all types, not just public libraries,” one person said.

Three people cited a growing reluctance to pay taxes. One person had recently been through a levy lift campaign. “We heard that people who use the library should support it financially and those who don’t shouldn’t. In another community, they said the library didn’t support family values, but the reality was they didn’t want to pay the tax.” Another person said, “The public demands high services but some loud voices are not willing to pay for them. They make it impossible to get levy lifts.”

The changing world of information

Five people described threats related to new ways of managing information. One cited the constant battle to make sure that people in the information technology industry “are aware of the value of the library as a resource and the value of well-trained information-management professionals.” Others talked about the need to avoid duplication in cataloging (“Legislators go to conferences and talk to each other and wonder why six states spent money to scan the same book.”), to capture and preserve digital knowledge, and to deal with copyright issues (“If a faculty member writes a paper, we have to buy the copyright back from the publisher.”). Another said that losing ownership of special collections was a threat, when university libraries put their collections on Google because they didn’t have the funds to digitize. “The threat is that your collections are owned by a commercial entity. I’d rather see it as libraries as the broad umbrella and Google as part of that.”

Changes in the customer base

Two people said that people had less time and expected more convenience. “The public is less patient and the public is willing to pay to get fast information. The \$5 they spend is better than a ‘no.’” Another said that a non-reading public was a threat. “I had a person ask me, what if a young child came in and wanted to read *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*? I said I’d probably hug him, because if he had the reading skills, I would be thrilled.”

Nationwide issues

Two people mentioned issues that could affect or are affecting the entire country. The first is an erosion of civil rights and freedoms, and the second would be a major social disruption like a socioeconomic downturn caused by terrorism, the demise of the fossil fuel economy or global warming. “The chance of our prosperity changing in the next 20 years is not at all remote.”

Opportunities

Governor Gregoire is keenly interested in revamping Washington's education system to be "world-class, learner-focused." WSL recently responded to a draft report to the legislature by the Washington Learns Steering Committee.³⁸

The Governor has created a Department of Early Learning and the public library directors are positioning themselves to become key players in the early childhood arena, with the Washington State Library in a coordinating role.³⁹

There are subgroups of the public library directors working on issues of state funding for a virtual library and renewed discussion of a statewide library card.

WSL is getting ready to implement OCLC's Group Services in July 2007. This "packaging" of OCLC services is being sold to states and consortia. Libraries must purchase their cataloging, interlibrary loan, and WorldCat through OCLC. In return – and for a fee – they can have a "Group Catalog" which is basically a state view of WorldCat sliced and diced in unlimited ways, e.g., the collections of all the libraries of the state; the collections of the two-year colleges; the collections of libraries in the Vancouver area, and so forth.

In a number of states, state funding goes directly to public libraries or indirectly to provide regional public library or multi-type library systems. This is not the case in Washington.

Andrew Carnegie went from building libraries to having his foundation press for standards and an infrastructure that would sustain what had been built. The Gates Foundation is moving from seeding computers in libraries to establishing an infrastructure that will sustain what has been established.

As noted earlier, Bertot and McClure have been working for some time to define and identify Successfully Networked Public Libraries. The Washington State Library, positioned in the home state of Microsoft, which is strong in technology, may be able to develop the statewide infrastructure for Successfully Networked Libraries of all types. That is especially true if WSL develops standards for Successfully Balanced Libraries – libraries that "balance books and bytes" in a way that the public will find desirable.

In the State of Michigan, the Public Library Funding Initiative Group (PFLIG) was a grassroots effort by Michigan's librarians, and others interested in library service, to address longstanding issues related to funding for public libraries in Michigan. A similar funding initiative encompassing all types of libraries, in conjunction with the Governor's Washington Learns initiative and with backing of the Gates Foundation, could develop a proposal that leapfrogs Washington ahead of other states in seamless and Successfully Balanced and Networked Libraries.

Library leaders may have a unique opportunity to develop a state funding initiative around a shared, multi-type vision for the Washington Library future that includes:

-
1. Statewide portal for electronic resources;
 2. Full text databases with statewide access and state funding;
 3. Metasearching;
 4. Bandwidth dealt with at state level;
 5. Virtual catalog;
 6. Statewide shared integrated library system and/or catalog using OCLC;
 7. Virtual reference; and
 8. Universal virtual and physical access – a statewide library card.

Opportunities for libraries in the state identified by the Library Council of Washington

- Pacific Rim business opportunities.
- Washington is home to Microsoft.
- State-level coordination of marketing instruction that libraries could use to better connect with their customers.
- 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 (ROI) statements at all levels. There are existing models that can be used as templates.
- Libraries can refocus energy on outreach to address social and demographic changes.
- Libraries are still seen as a community commons.
- The academic community can forge alliances that compete with and may replace expensive subscriptions.

Opportunities identified in interviews with library leaders statewide

When people talked about opportunities, four were mentioned most often: services to niches within the larger community; digital information and technology; reference services; and libraries as the center of the community. Mentioned slightly less often were marketing, collaboration among libraries, and outreach and partnerships. Mentioned least often were the statewide context and staffing opportunities, along with programming for adults.

Summary – What are the three major opportunities facing your library?

- | | |
|----|---|
| 15 | Serving niche markets – public and school libraries |
| 12 | Digital information and technology |
| 10 | Reference services |
| 8 | Libraries as the center of the community |
| 7 | Marketing – letting people know what the library offers |
| 7 | Collaboration among libraries |

7	Outreach and partnerships
3	The statewide context
3	The context for staffing
1	Programming for adults

The statewide context and staffing opportunities

These topics affect all libraries and were mentioned mainly by people involved in educating new librarians. They provide context (and a dash of inspiration) that can inform the other results.

The statewide context includes a rich research environment, a critical mass of organizational resources, and an educated population. “Washington possesses an educated and ambitious population who read and engage in information-intensive recreation,” one person said. Another pointed to the rich research environment, saying, “There is a vibrancy in this state that is recognizable and real. There is a sense of creativity and a sense of future-looking and visioning. It’s very much associated with technology and biotechnology, these rich research environments. The opportunity for the library to be part of that culture of discovery and creativity...seems to me to be a tremendous opportunity.”

One called Washington the library capital of the world. “We have terrific public library systems. We have the University of Washington library, which won ‘academic library of the year’ three years ago, and the information school, which is ranked fourth in the country (by *U.S. News & World Report*). We have some excellent school library people and we have a good state library now. We have the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. And we’re in a capital of the information age. What an opportunity!

We have this opportunity to truly say what the information institution throughout our society should be. We can do that in the state of Washington.”

Other statewide opportunities relate to staffing. One subject involved in education noted that the University of Washington Information School is highly ranked and serves the seven surrounding states that don’t have information schools. “Libraries have the opportunity to hire the very best and to create relationships with the information school.”

A person with a special library said that new librarians also offer opportunities. “I think librarians now are more open.

They may be recruiting people who are a little more open to the social graces, in general, than they did years ago. If new librarians are willing to speak up, to say we need more money, to partner with people in the community...The group I grew up with was more traditional. Young librarians are an opportunity.”

A librarian with a large public library said that investing in staff members provided

“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 special library

another opportunity. “We’ve pumped tons of money into staff training. To see the growth in the staff over the last couple of years is amazing.”

Serving niche markets – public libraries

Within the public and school populations, interview subjects saw strong opportunities to serve niche markets. As one person said, “Libraries have always suffered from thinking they have to be all things to everyone, and we can’t afford to do that. But we’ve not been very good at selecting our niches.”

In the public library realm, people suggested a variety of niche markets. *Four persons mentioned the need to focus on early learning*, both strengthening the offerings and letting the public know what libraries already do. “There’s a growing interest in early learning, pre-kindergarten,” one person said. “It’s a big opportunity for libraries to make sure that we’re at the table, because we’ve been providing that service for years.”

Another person said it was important that libraries should be seen as part of the continuum of education. “There are so many opportunities and holes that are not being filled. A major activity should be looking beyond public libraries and toward the education area.”

Other niche markets mentioned were seniors, businesses, life-long learners, and students needing homework help, as well as serving immigrants with ESL opportunities, job resources and help with gaining citizenship.

Serving niche markets – school libraries

Teacher-librarians identified mandates for classroom-based assessment and a senior culminating project as offering opportunities to serve students and teachers affected by both.

Classroom-based assessment (CBA) takes the place of the WASL test in several curriculum areas, such as social studies, fine arts and health and fitness. The state requires that students from third through twelfth grades do a research project and write a paper or offer a presentation. “They have to find primary and secondary sources, evaluate the relevance of the material, and you can’t do that without a library,” one said. Another said the social studies CBA was a “great opportunity to partner with teachers to contribute to student achievement.”

High school seniors, starting in 2008, are required to produce a senior culminating project based on their interests and career plans. “It makes libraries, once again, relevant to students. They’re doing primary research all over the place. The library becomes where we make connections for kids. This could be the saving grace of school libraries.”

Digital information and technology

While technology can be seen as a threat, many people interviewed also saw it as an opportunity to serve new customers or serve existing customers better.

Three people welcomed the opportunity to embrace new technology. A teacher-

librarian said, “Blogs and wikis and podcasts...we call it participatory culture. It’s two-way information. I’m the one who needs to be and can be knowledgeable about it.” A special library representative said that library’s radio reading service had just been put online, which provides the opportunity for “increased patron sophistication and an upgrading of the programming of the radio reading service.” Someone from a large public library said that now that her library had the technological infrastructure in place, it was catching up. “Now we’re doing downloadable audio, for example. Three years ago, there were places in one county here that didn’t have telephones.”

Three subjects, two from academic libraries, said digital collections offered an opportunity. A person with a special library said that the big opportunity was for a union catalog resource for Washington that focused on digital media content. “We have yet to see a true Washington comprehensive digital initiative that will provide universal access.” The academic librarians saw a new role for preserving and providing access to digital information. “We have the tradition of building collections, which transfers to being that entity that builds information databases,” one said. Another said the library was working with faculty to develop digital collections by digitizing unusual print materials and items like the student newspaper.

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 large public library

Two persons said online databases offered an opportunity. Online databases represent information that customers can’t get on their own, and the use of federal funds to subsidize databases that some libraries couldn’t have afforded on their own was a popular service.

Two individuals pointed to the opportunity to bridge the digital divide. “It brings people into the library building, offering a service like high-speed access that not everybody can afford,” said one person from a mid-sized public library. “Once there, they see other services that can meet their needs.”

One person said open-source software was an opportunity. The special library representative said she was taking open-source software much more seriously today than just a few years ago. “For example, there are several open-source software programs that let you build a digital repository of your faculty’s papers. And communities of users have evolved that are very sophisticated so that there’s better support than you’d get from a vendor.”

Another subject, also with a special library, saw *opportunities in the expanded use of digital technology.* The person said that we will look back on today as the infancy of digital media. “There are going to be great advances, in particular, in image recognition and automatic indexing of contents. It’ll be an opportunity for us to define digital media librarians and the associate collection management methodology. It’ll be an interesting time.”

Reference services

The vast amount of information available online provides new opportunities to help people

manage it and make it easier to find, to provide instruction in information literacy, and to provide customized information.

Three people said that making it easier to gain access to information was an opportunity. They talked about asking people how they want to receive information, as well as streamlining delivery systems. “The need is for us to have one search that tells you what you want is in Pullman or the local city library,” one said. Another said, “People tell me I’d rather go to Amazon to see information about the book than go to the catalog. Our innovative system, the new modules will allow customer reviews.”

Three people said their libraries had an opportunity to help people manage information. “People return to us because they’re inundated. You do a Google search and you get too much. It’s a great opportunity to work with students so they can distinguish information,” an academic library representative said. Someone from a large public library said they had started 24/7 reference services in 2006. “That’s being used pretty heavily and people love it. Then you don’t have to have the library doors open 24/7, but you can still access information, and they can do it from their phones.”

Along the same lines, *two people said libraries had an opportunity to provide instruction in information literacy.* The individuals were from a school and an academic library. “It’s sort of ironic that people say they don’t need libraries, but we need kids to read and be information literate,” one said.

Two individuals said providing customized information was an opportunity.

Libraries as the center of the community

Seven people said that libraries had the opportunity to serve as gathering places for the community. “We’re the core for the kinds of values that I think people still admire, like connection, sense of place, stability, a sense that, even though people have busy lives, there is a magnet that draws you in for entertainment or education,” one person with a large public library said. Someone with a small public library said, “We’re one of the nicer, more respected buildings in town, and people take pride in it.” An academic librarian said, “We have thousands of students in the building every day because we’re access to study spaces, to wireless, to intellectual exploration. It’s a safe physical place to be.”

Interview subjects said that serving as a gathering place depends on having decent facilities to offer. (“I wouldn’t even mention this if we hadn’t just won our bond measure,” one person said.) Someone with a large public library said it’s important to build community spaces into building design, including a public meeting room that’s available after hours. The same library now offers permanent mail-in ballot return boxes at every branch, prompted by customers who dropped their ballots in the book return.

One person said libraries had the opportunity to be part of a community’s planning for the future. “As many cities and towns go to redevelopment and look for ways to present town centers, it’s an opportunity for us to be part of the planning.”

Marketing

Marketing, which was mentioned 22 times as a weakness of libraries, was mentioned seven times as an opportunity. Most people talked in terms of getting out in the community. A person with a special library said, “I write articles and put them in the paper. I get our poster out into the community, our own and the ALA posters. You have to get them into the community store and the gas station and the post office.” Another subject said, “The biggest opportunity is to put the customer at the center of the experience, to turn the customer into their messenger.”

One person said her library had the opportunity to build on a great brand. “People trust us and we’ve been successful. People in the county are always bragging to people in the city about how good their library is.”

Another subject said libraries had the opportunity to communicate using new language. “If I could change one thing, I would get people to quit saying that they’re free. They’re not free. People make a small initial investment to get a huge return. They don’t tell the return-on-investment story out there. People who are more conservative with their dollars...hate the word ‘free.’”

Collaboration among libraries

Seven subjects said that collaboration among libraries was an opportunity, citing the potential for a shared vision, resource sharing, coordination, and programs like Connecting Learners to Libraries.

Three persons said that creating a shared vision was an opportunity. A subject from the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State said, “We need to have a common vision and we need to work together. Our librarians have really embraced that. It’s an opportunity we have, to ride that high and continue it.” A person with a support organization said that Washington’s library community was more fragmented than those in some other states. “A major opportunity for us is to find ways to work together for the ideal of library service for everyone in the state. That will move us toward providing shared databases and finding ways to help each other be more visible in our communities.”

One representative of a special library said resource sharing was an opportunity, one that had benefited her library. A consultant connected the 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.”

A person with the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State said

One library formed a foundation about four years ago, hired a fund developer, and began holding events and making requests of individuals. “We have a 12-month program where we get sponsors from the business community, with a menu of support from \$1,000 on up, and we give them different rewards in terms of advertising, depending.”

Comment from large public library

that *coordination would allow libraries to offer complementary services*. “If they coordinate, libraries will be more supportive of what school systems are doing, supportive of what people need for their jobs and careers, supplementing what’s not readily available.”

A teacher-librarian cited projects like Connecting Learners to Libraries as an opportunity. The Washington State Library provided \$2,000 grants to create cooperation among different types of libraries and to connect users to the information they need. “We are trying to work together to start the idea that libraries are libraries no matter where they are.”

Outreach and partnerships

Seven subjects talked about the role that libraries could play in their communities, not so much as a means to market the library, but as a way to be an integral part of the fabric of life.

Two persons, both from the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State, said that libraries could be the center of their communities. “We can be an entity that pulls people together.”

“In what we’re doing with teens – cool spaces, book lists, and gaming events – we’re not seeing a decline in teen use, we’re seeing a surge where they’re more engaged than ever.”

One subject talked about partnerships with nonprofit organizations. The person, with a small public library, cited a program her library initiated. The library hosted three brunches for local nonprofits to talk about how they could pool their common interests. As a result, the library worked with the senior center to provide book services and it visited schools. It also

Comment from large public library

hosted workshops for nonprofit treasurers, to show them how to keep the books, and for board and staff members on fundraising. “Networking in the community is vital and who better to play the role of the facilitator than the library?”

Another said that public/private partnerships held promise. So far, though, many of those opportunities have been unexplored. “They think that the folks who are their competition are to be rallied against and defied rather than embraced. Some, though, are locating library branches in malls and thinking about becoming innovative rather than maintaining the tradition.”

One person, with a large public library, said libraries had the opportunity to be community problem-solvers. “We have the opportunity to...work with cities and county governments, not waiting to be called on as a resource,” the person said. “It’s a frame of mind, that increasingly library staff members are seen as valuable players in forging the future of their communities.”

Programming for adults

A subject with a mid-sized public library said that libraries had the opportunity to offer programs for adults. “There’s not much programming for adults in most places. There are op-

portunities to get funds from the humanities council and other places for programs, but many libraries are not pursuing it.”

What is the one most important result of a shared vision?

We asked interview subjects, if libraries in Washington were guided by a shared vision, what one outcome would be most valuable to their libraries.

Summary – What is the one most important result of a shared vision?

- 10 Libraries viewed as relevant and necessary
- 10 Statewide library card and virtual library
- 3 Collaboration among libraries around the state
- 3 Reaching new audiences
- 2 Libraries seen as educational institutions
- 2 State funding for libraries
- 1 Core services are offered at every library
- 1 State library is more prominent

Libraries would be viewed as relevant and necessary

Ten persons said that if their community saw their library as relevant and necessary, that would be the best result. This response was given by two from mid-size and two from small public libraries, one teacher-librarian, one from librarian education, one from other constituents, and three from the Washington State Library/Office of the Secretary of State.

Interview subjects said that the key to relevance was meeting the needs of each community, recognizing that how that looks will vary from place to place. “The simple message remains that libraries are about community service and local impact. Those are the key value propositions,” one person said. Another said, “It’s important that libraries be flexible, to stay in touch and be out front in finding out what the community wants.” One subject said that putting the customer at the center was key to being relevant to the community. “If I could make every library do Planning for Results, I would make them. The benefits to the library would be that their programs, services and staffing model would actually get them to an end that they and the community agree is the right end.”

Another subject focused on finding a unique niche. “I define the sweet spot as what the users are expecting. If libraries can define what makes them unique, then they can begin to find the unique niche for the libraries of the future.”

If libraries were seen as community resources, according to one subject, “They would ask us to meet new needs instead of us always going to them. They would recognize and take more initiative, saying ‘You guys are so good, why don’t you do this?’”

Statewide library card and virtual library

Ten individuals said their best result would be a statewide library card and/or a virtual library. People who chose this result included four from large public libraries, two teacher-librarians, two from special libraries and one with librarian education.

Two subjects said that a statewide library card would improve marketing. “This would make it easier for everyone to explain and market what we’re doing...It’s currently way too local because of the funding, which is a barrier.” Another said that statewide equal access to library materials “would be a strong statement of the importance of information...I don’t know the physical impact it would have compared to the wonderful visibility it would have.”

Two said that it would eliminate the need for people in unincorporated areas or those that don’t pay for libraries to buy library cards, which was seen as a benefit. One said it would solve a problem her library faces, of withholding access to people who don’t pay for a library. “In our area, one community has a library of its own, but we let them use our libraries. Towns that don’t have a library system, that won’t support libraries, we don’t let them use our libraries. We’re not talking about poor areas; we’re talking about a wealthy area that chose to continue not having a library. We’re trying to encourage them to support libraries.”

One said that a statewide library card would have dramatic benefits like the electronic databases that began being purchased statewide in the 1990s, and would require equally dramatic shifts in funding. “All our funding is local, and a virtual library or statewide library card would require a major statewide shift in how the state legislature would view us.”

One person, with a special library, talked in terms of statewide interlibrary loan among all libraries rather than a statewide library card. “Interlibrary loan would be a huge benefit, especially for our college students and distance learners.”

Five of the nine subjects focused on services available online. A shared web portal would give every citizen in Washington access to the same online resources. A teacher-librarian said, “There’s a standard of 12 or 15 databases and I have four. Some school districts have none.” The downside, according to another teacher-librarian, is that “it sort of supports people’s misconceptions about being able to get everything online.”

One person with a special library suggested purchasing specialized databases. “The state library’s work to facilitate consortial purchasing has had a great positive impact on us. They could go beyond that to facilitate the purchase of more narrow databases or resources, not just the central, multi-purpose resources they should continue to purchase.”

Another person with a special library favored a statewide digital library, which

“There is a vibrancy in this state that is recognizable and real. There is a sense of creativity and a sense of future-looking and visioning. It’s very much associated with technology and biotechnology, these rich research environments. The opportunity for the library to be part of that culture of discovery and creativity...seems to me to be a tremendous opportunity.”

Comment from librarian educator

should be organized at the grassroots level. “There’s a lot of benefit to organizing at the state level in terms of exposure to the legislature and funding and support, but there’s also the danger of excluding a lot of potential applications for state digital libraries.”

A librarian educator talked in terms of a blending of the virtual and physical library in one central place, rather than every library having a website. “Imagine if you’re online and your home page comes up and you have a feeling of being in a library. Like a real library, there are people to help and they look and act like people, and the resources are there and it’s easier than Google, and the websites have been validated so you can trust them,” the person said. “What is the information baseline for our society in five to ten years and how can libraries be that true utility for every user?”

Collaboration among libraries around the state

Three persons said that statewide collaboration would be their favored result. The three included two with large public libraries and one with an academic library.

One talked in terms of building relationships across the Cascades. “We need to get to know people from the other side of the mountains, to have a more free flow of information. The people are very nice on the other side of the mountains, they just have a different point of view. It’s the difference between city and rural.”

Another said cooperation would help encourage more cooperation. “Washington libraries don’t cooperate in a way that I’ve experienced in other states. It would be great if we could talk with each other and agree that there are things we need to cooperate on.”

The third said it was important that libraries speak with one voice, a role fulfilled by the Washington State Library. “Even the Seattle Public Library is financially strapped, yet small rural libraries in Washington are doing similarly wonderful things and have much less opportunity to market it. The state library has been doing an incredible job of getting the word out.”

Reaching new audiences

Three persons said that it was important to reach new audiences for what libraries offer. Two, with a small public and support organization, talked in terms of reaching non-users. One, with a special library, talked in terms of serving the blind and physically disabled.

To reach non-users, subjects said, it was important to look beyond people who love books. “There are so many people who do not know what libraries can offer, and it starts way back in school. Libraries as a whole need to look at the broader audience, like the business community or local governments, and serving them. We need to look beyond youngsters and people who love to read fiction.”

One said that all libraries should serve the blind and physically disabled, not just the libraries that specialize. “Oftentimes, people go to the regular library and are told we don’t have anything for you, or told they should go to the library for the blind. Sometimes the person just wants a movie or services from reference.”

Libraries seen as educational institutions

Two persons, one teacher-librarian and one with a large public library, said that libraries should be seen as educational institutions.

The teacher-librarian suggested statewide standards for information literacy and technology skills. Today, she said, the standards vary from district to district. “Right now, it depends on how much they value it.”

The person with the large public library talked about how adopting Every Child Ready to Read and focusing on educational outcomes had transformed the library. The library began using the program as a way to find a common language with the schools and to use educational outcomes and performance management. “Before that, people saw us as babysitters or Cub Scout leaders. We told the 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 WASL, and we’re more necessary now. When we get staff together, it’s very different. Before, everything was kind of soft and mushy, and when we did training it was about how to do songs and storytime. Now they 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. That’s definitely not normal.”

State funding for libraries

Two persons, from a special library and a support organization, said state funding for libraries would be their favored result. One said Washington was “one of the few states that doesn’t get funding from the legislature directly for libraries.” The other said, “Westerners are very independent, but state funding would help so many small, rural libraries that have to share whatever money is raised at the local folk festival with the fire department.”

Core services are offered at every library

One person, with a small public library, said every library should offer a basic set of services at a set level of quality in terms of materials and databases. “It’s got to be state-driven or federally driven,” the person said, “because I’m already maxed. It’s using the millions of dollars the state library already gets in a better way, so everybody gets to share in the pie.”

State library is more prominent

One person, with an academic library, said that the favored result would be “to reestablish the Washington State Library into a recognized entity in the state. It would serve its constituency, the state government. It would be a recognized leader by the public libraries in the state. It would coordinate resource-sharing efforts and access to electronic resources. The whole population of the state is better served by coordination.”

Survey of staff members and the public

As part of our analysis of issues that affect Washington libraries now and in the future, Consensus developed a survey with two tracks: one for library patrons and one for library administration, trustees, and staff. The intent of the survey was not to create valid inferences about the two groups,⁴⁰ but rather, to validate qualitatively the other parts of the research presented herein as well as obtain insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by Washington's libraries. We were not disappointed.

We created the survey with a mix of close-ended (structured) and open-ended questions (unstructured, where respondents could give their own answers). The close-ended questions were based on our prior knowledge of the library research. The open-ended questions were created when we felt we needed to learn more from the relevant populations. For example, we wanted to know about service challenges faced by staff in their own words. The survey was posted from December 15, 2006-January 7, 2007.

Because of the short time frame for collecting responses and the two holidays that fell within the survey time period, Consensus was concerned that we would not be able to collect enough responses to produce useful data. The quick response from the library community to a request from State Librarian Jan Walsh was gratifying.

Overview of responses

Patron track. The survey received 283 public responses. The vast majority of responses were from those who use a public library, as opposed to non-users or those who use other types of libraries. The information provided excellent insights into the current and future use of the libraries.

While there were fewer surveys from college/university respondents, there was a good mix of faculty, administrators and students, considering the fact that the survey was conducted while schools were on their semester break.

A large number of participants in the patron survey, 253, were also willing to provide personal demographic information in addition to their survey responses. The staff survey did not seek this information.

Primary Library Type					
Which type of library do you use MOST?					
Data Value	n=	%	0%	50%	100%
Public	262	92.6%			
School K - 12	7	2.5%			
College / Univ.	12	4.2%			
Tribal	0	0.0%			
Business	0	0.0%			
Government	1	0.4%			
Medical	0	0.0%			
Legal	0	0.0%			
Other	1	0.4%			
Legend (N=283)					

Staff and board track. There was a response of 340 for the staff and board survey. Participants included a good mix of library administrators, professional, and support staff as well as 27 responses from library trustees, as the table below shows.

Respondent					
How would best describe your position:					
Data Value	n=	%	0%	25%	50%
Library administrator or management	98	28.8%			
Librarian or professional staff member	146	42.9%			
Paraprofessional or other library support staff	69	20.3%			
Library trustee or board member	27	7.9%			
Legend All (N=340)					

While the Washington State Library will be provided with the complete survey results, here is our attempt to analyze and interpret some of the more significant results based on our

research to date. Points of comparison among responses on both surveys as well as links to recent studies of libraries, especially the OCLC Scan and *Long Overdue* are noted.

Public Survey

It was not surprising, given the way responses were solicited, that survey respondents were heavy users of the library. What was surprising, though, were the number of public library respondents (67%) who indicated they used the library weekly or daily.

Use of library facilities

Along with a variety of other questions, we asked the respondents how frequently they used the library for a variety of purposes that are noted in the table below.

Use	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Check out books, videos or CDs in English	89.8%	8.4%	1.8%	0%
Check out books, videos or CDs not in English	1.5%	10.2%	23.6%	64.7%
Read or study	16%	32.7%	30.2%	21.1%
Obtain information on a school project	12.4%	25.1%	13.8%	48.7%
Obtain information for career or job	13.8%	26.2%	24.0%	36.0%
Ask staff a reference question	10.2%	47.6%	33.5%	8.7%
Bring children	24.4%	14.5%	12.0%	49.1%
Attend a meeting, class or other event	9.8%	23.6%	32.0%	34.5%
Use the history or genealogy section	5.1%	18.9%	28.7%	47.3%
Use a library computer	37.1%	30.5%	16.4%	16.0%
Use the WIFI connection	6.2%	13.5%	15.3%	65.1%

**The question read, "When visiting the library, how often do you _____?" The answers were "Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely or Never." (Respondents asked about the library they use the most.)*

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.⁴¹ Responses from the Washington users seem to parallel those traditional library use results.

“Check[ing] out books, videos or CDs in English” was the major activity reported with 89.8% of the respondents reporting that they do this frequently. While the survey did not seek information about use of the reference collection, 57.8% indicated that they asked staff reference questions occasionally to frequently.

Responses also indicate that libraries are mostly in-and-out activities, with 51.3% indicating that they rarely to never read or study while there. While we did not specifically ask if the use was mainly for recreational resources, 60% indicated that they rarely to never use the library for career or job information.

The negative response on school projects was even higher. However, given the low percent of response from students (8.7%) and the high response from library users who already had 4-year college degrees (25.8%) and graduate degrees (34.5%), this is not a surprising result.

Use of library computers during the visit was also high, with 67.6% indicating occasional to frequent use. No follow up questions were asked to determine whether that use was to search the library’s catalog or use, the library’s databases, or access the Internet.

We note two things here. The people who chose to respond to our survey are not likely to use the history/genealogy section (76% say they rarely or never use it) and are also not that likely to attend meetings, classes or other events at the library (66.5% say they rarely or never do it).

Two qualifications are important.

A fairly large percentage of respondents (61.1%) indicated that they rarely to never bring children to the library. This number may actually be underestimated in the population of actual library users. Those with children may not have had enough time to complete the survey onsite or not have used the library during the window for survey taking.

Second, without knowing how many Washington libraries currently provide WiFi connectivity, it is impossible to determine whether the “Never” response rate of 65.1% is significant or insignificant. There were also insignificant response differences between suburban/urban and rural/small town.

Current use of library websites

Use	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Log in to library account	79.1%	14.2%	3.7%	3.0%
Request a book or other circulating item	78.7%	14.6%	5.2%	1.5%
Use online databases	35.4%	37.3%	18.3%	9.0%
Ask a reference question	3.4%	17.9%	33.6%	45.1%
Post a comment or complaint	0.4%	5.2%	27.6%	66.8%
Check on upcoming library activities	13.8%	40.7%	28.0%	17.5%

**The question read, “When visiting the library’s website, how often do you _____?”*

The large majority of respondents reported that they visited their library websites at least once each month (92.9%), with around one-third of respondents noting they visit the website every day. So, use of the library website was very strong, and we especially note the two features connected to circulation activities – logging into their library accounts and requesting books or other circulating items. Most public libraries who provide these features report heavy use. Both are very popular with the public. The response to these features was similar for both urban/suburban and rural/small town libraries. In fact, responses to all the questions asked about use of the library website were similar, no matter from what kind of community the respondent hails.

A surprisingly high rate of use was indicated for the library’s online databases. The combined frequent and occasional use reported was 72.7%.

In the OCLC study awareness of library electronic resources indicated 39% awareness of library databases and a 57% response of not sure. The study did note that “awareness varies with age. U.S. 18- to 24-year olds are more aware compared to U.S. respondents 25 and older....U.S. respondents 65 and older have the lowest level of awareness of library electronic resources.”⁴²

We suspect the difference in response may be due to the fact that the OCLC study drew on a general population, where our survey drew on those who used the library frequently. However, we still note these results are encouraging for the state overall.

In some way the response to the feature of asking reference questions on the website was extremely low given the fact that many Washington libraries have some type of “Ask a Librarian” feature on their website.⁴³ However, the OCLC survey came up with

high negative results, showing 39% had never used the feature. In speculating why, the low use is either from lack of awareness of the feature or is tied to the ease of searching on the Internet.

Clearly, the respondents to this survey do use the Internet, despite not using the feature about “asking a librarian.” When asked, “[w]hen I need information, I am most likely to...” approximately 45% say they search the Internet. One-third say they help themselves at the library, another 13.8% say they search the library website and 10.6% say they ask an actual librarian.

Finally, the respondents acknowledged their preference for Internet searching by identifying search engines as the main competition for libraries (46.3%).

User satisfaction

Respondents expressed high overall satisfaction with the library they report using most, which seems to meet their needs. Fifty-six percent of the respondents did indicate that they used more than one library. The majority of that use, 61% in the rural/small town and 54% in the urban/suburban, is public library to public library. The survey did not ask respondents to indicate whether the use was of another library in their home library district or use of a non-district location. Even without that distinction the yes response is significant enough to factor into future planning and funding at the state level.

A 93% satisfaction rate is extremely good. It may not be truly reflective of library users in the state because the sample was not randomly selected. Library collections were the top reason for satisfaction, followed by staff. The much smaller percentage of dissatisfied customers was unhappy with collections and staff, with several indicating that the libraries did not have what they needed.

Many suggestions were made for ways to improve service.

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 (want babysitting, smaller fines, no waits for holds, 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”).*

Even though they begin their information seeking by searching the Internet and are very computer savvy, most respondents, 89.4%, do feel that libraries are still unique. Respondents were also asked a question about a move to charge for information that is currently free on the Internet. They showed little awareness of this future possibility. This might be of concern in planning for libraries, which would either have to absorb those costs as part of providing service or pass on the cost to the patron. The conflict is that library patrons 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. not “A” or “I don’t know”).*

Libraries in the future

The final set of questions was developed to identify what would be important needs for libraries to meet in the future. For the most part, both the structured and unstructured 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 only surprising because Internet searching, which does not guarantee reliable information, is currently the preferred way to seek information (see above).






The following table rates the future need for different services:

Needs	Very High	High	Moderate	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 quick access	65.4%	25.8%	7.4%	1.1%	0.4%

Staff Survey

Because all levels of staff, as well as library trustees, responded, this survey is rich in information about how each group views the many issues facing public libraries. While the most responses were from public library personnel, enough responses from the school and academic communities were also collected to make comparing some of the different groups relevant for some questions. We present such comparisons when we believe the question warrants it.

Respondents

Respondent					
How would best describe your position:					
Data Value	n=	%	0%	25%	50%
Library administrator or management	98	28.8%			
Librarian or professional staff member	146	42.9%			
Paraprofessional or other library support staff	69	20.3%			
Library Trustee or board member	27	7.9%			
Legend					
 All (N= 340)					

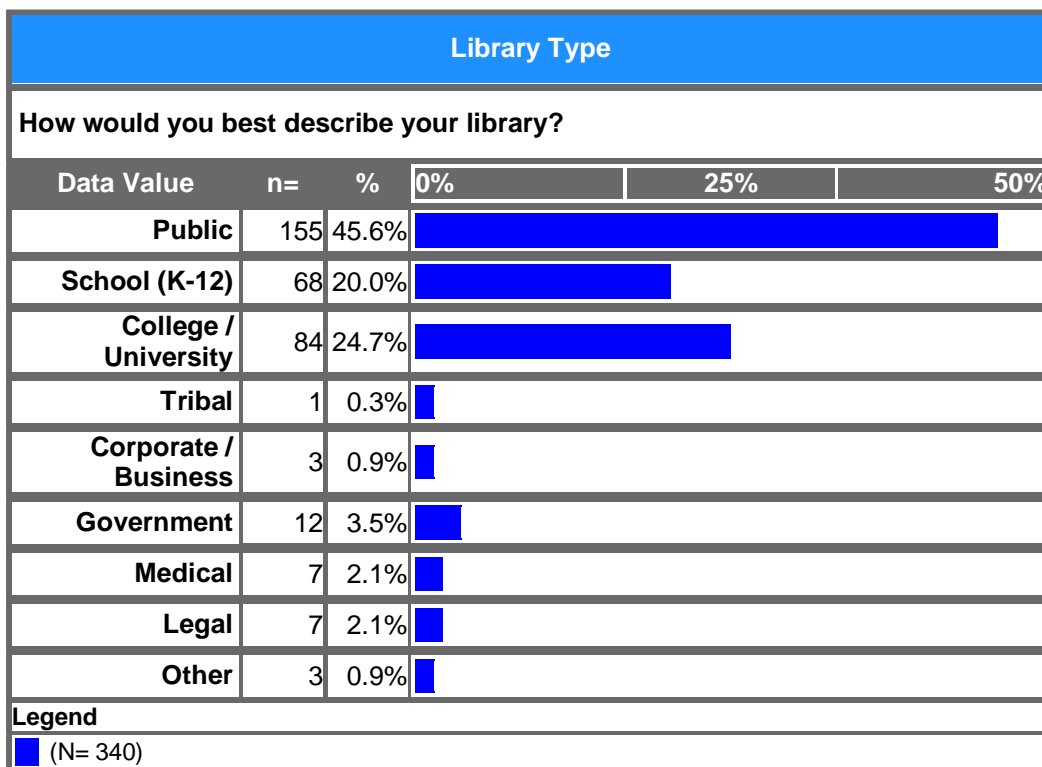
Public library administrators were the largest number of respondents in the administrators group, followed by academic, then school. The highest response rate at the librarian level came from school librarians, while public library staff dominated the responses from other library staff.

Administrators by Type of Library	28.8%
Public	58
Academic	24
School	4

Librarians by Type of Library	42.9%
School	54
Public	40
Academic	31

Staff by Type of Library	20.3%
Public	30
Academic	28
School	9

The chart below shows the breakdown by type of library:



Service challenges

Some of the most important questions asked were a series of open-ended questions asking the staff members to note the first, second and third most-important service challenges they face. In order to facilitate understanding of the data provided by this question, we placed the different responses (for the first two challenges) into categories, such as funding, staffing, technology, collections, mission, and management and governance.

Overall, we found that funding ranked as one of the most important service challenges faced by librarians. Our coding scheme, however, probably underestimated the concern with which the librarians view adequate funding. For example, if the service challenge was written, as one person put it, “[b]udget for books and materials is inadequate” we coded the response as a collection issue, as it provided more specific information about why the funds were needed.

At the administrative level, funding was of concern across the board. One library administrator expressed it in a third-choice response: “If I had the space, not enough money to purchase the varmint.” Library administrators mentioned funding 40 times.

Librarians were also concerned with the dollars and what they could buy. The 149 librarians mentioned funding in all categories a total of 79 times.

Trustees were less likely to mention funding as a concern. The few times it was mentioned it was usually linked to a service as in “there’s not enough money to.” Perhaps

the reason why it showed up less at the trustee level is due to comments like this: “Our librarian and staff do an excellent job to minimize problems.”

Staff also voiced financial concerns. They also usually expressed it as “there’s not enough money to” except for one determined person who responded with emphasis by listing it three times - “Funding,” “Funding,” and “And Again Funding.”

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.

Staff Members’ View of the Greatest Service Challenge Facing Their Libraries

Comment Type	Percent Reporting
Funding (General or more than one thing mentioned)	16.2%
Computers/Technology access or use/Digitizing collections	15.3%
Staffing (General, but including also retention, communication or scheduling)	13%
Marketing/Education	8.8%
Location/Facility/Hours of operation	8.8%
Patrons’ use or misuse	8.8%
Collection (books, magazines or explicitly print materials)	8.6%
Patrons in community (diverse community or community with problems)	5.9%
Balancing or trading off among resources	3.5%
Mission or relevance	2.7%
Management or governance	2.1%
Programming	0%
Other (including one “none”)	6.2%

**The question read, “Please type the greatest service challenge facing your library.”*

***The percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding. There were 339 valid responses to this question (i.e., providing a response)*

Staff Members' View of the Second Greatest Service Challenge Facing Their Libraries

Comment Type	Percent Reporting
Staffing (General, but including also retention, communication or scheduling)	16.5%
Funding (General or more than one thing mentioned)	15.3%
Computers/Technology access or use/Digitizing collections	13.8%
Location/Facility/Hours of operation	12.3%
Marketing/Education	9.6%
Collection (books, magazines or explicitly print materials)	6.6%
Patrons in community (diverse community or community with problems)	6.6%
Patrons' use or misuse	6.3%
Management or governance	2.4%
Mission or relevance	2.1%
Balancing or trading off among resources	1.8%
Programming	1.0%
Other	5.7%

**The question read, "Please type the second greatest service challenge facing your library."*

*** There were 333 valid responses to this question (i.e., providing a response. The one "not sure" response is not considered valid for the purpose of this analysis).*

Training

Training is one service of the Washington State Library. Survey respondents were asked if they would seek training from the WSL.

Will you turn to the state library for training in the next three years?					
Data Value	N=	%	0%	25%	50%
Yes	160	47.1%			
No	24	7.1%			
Not sure	156	45.9%			

Respondents were also given space to identify the primary type of training desired. They fell into seven topic areas:

1. Library management
2. Language
3. Customer service/Patron dealings/Marketing
4. Service ideas/Specialized education programs (i.e., programs for teens or specialized legal training)
5. New funding sources
6. Technology use
7. Staff training
8. Other

Technology and digital resources

Concerns about digital resources showed up in both the challenges and training responses from staff. In those sections the concerns centered on costs, staff training, and public use of the resources.

Four survey questions took a closer look at the topic. The first question asked if the library had purchased resources, and 77.9% responded yes to the question. The second asked how libraries that had purchased resources were paying for them, and 84.2% indicated they used their operating budgets. The ability to add more digital resources was listed as a challenge. The third survey question asked about where this need should be met. The two sources most often chosen were state dollars, 37.0%, and local dollars, 24.5%. The last question asked how purchasing digital resources affected other parts of the budget. Of the total, 60.5% indicated an affect on the book budget and 31.4% indicated no impact.

Current and future support

Although the questions were worded slightly differently, staff was right on target in knowing that the public supported confidentiality, privacy and intellectual freedom. The combined rate of 78.5% agree/strongly agrees parallels the 85.9% response in the public survey to the statement, “Libraries should have policies in place to protect my privacy.”

Staff was less sure that the public values what they offer and would support them in the future. Even though the questions were not worded the same, the patrons responded positively to the need for future funding, which is a strong predictor of support. The *Long Overdue* report emphasized that library patrons were a strong resource for libraries seeking funding support in the community.

Staff Response

Financial Support					
The public values what we offer and will financially support our needs in the future, even if it requires additional funding or tax increases.					
Data Value	N=	%	0%	20%	40%
Strongly Disagree	8	2.4%			
Disagree	74	21.8%			
Neutral	116	34.1%			
Agree	114	33.5%			
Strongly Agree	28	8.2%			

Public Response

Increased Funding					
How willing are you to help pay for your ideal library through increased taxes or appropriations?					
Data Value	N=	%	0%	30%	60%
Very Willing	161	56.9%			
Somewhat willing	108	38.2%			
Not willing	14	4.9%			

Staff views of community needs

In an initial review of the survey questions, Washington State Library staff expressed an interest in our measuring support for three of their initiatives. The results show concern in the library world for all three.

Community Needs	Percent that Agree or Strongly Agree
Multi-Language Library Services	67.1%
Literacy Initiatives	75.3%
Early Learning Initiatives	75.6%

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

While no parallel questions were asked on the public survey, the Americans for Libraries Council new report, *Long Overdue, a fresh look at public and leadership attitudes about libraries in the 21st century*, indicates public strong support in these areas.

Appendix A

Interview Subjects

Each person interviewed was asked five questions built around a SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. We provided interview subjects with the questions in advance, and all took the opportunity to prepare. Most interviews took about 30 minutes.

The Washington State Library provided a list of interview subjects that represented the Washington library community. Interviewees included: directors or trustees of small, medium and large public libraries; teacher-librarians; directors of special and academic libraries; leaders in information science education; leaders in the Washington State Library and Office of the Secretary of State; and other constituents.

We have included both verbatim quotes from interviews and summaries of the answers given. In very few cases it will be possible to connect a person with a particular quote. In most cases, the speaker will remain anonymous.

Many thanks to the individuals who graciously contributed their time and wisdom. In alphabetical order, they are:

Sue Ammeter, member, Council for the Blind

Sarah Applegate, teacher-librarian, North Thurston School District, River Ridge High School

Harry Bruce, dean, University of Washington Information School

Charles Chamberlin, senior associate dean, University of Washington Libraries

Ann Marie Clark, director, Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center Arnold Library

Kevin Comerford, group manager, media content management, Microsoft Corporation

Kristy Coomes, president, Friends of the Washington State Library

Eve Datisman, resourceress, Port Angeles School District, Port Angeles High School

Laura K. Lee Dellinger, senior executive vice president/principal, Metropolitan Group

Mike Eisenberg, professor/dean emeritus, University of Washington Information School

Steve Excell, assistant secretary of state, Office of the Secretary of State

Sherry Ann Hokanson, director, Fairchild Air Force Base Library

Adrian Holm, library technician, Colville Tribal Libraries / Resource Center

Marianne Hunter, teacher-librarian, Timberline High School

Deborah Jacobs, director, Seattle Public Library

Kristie Kirkpatrick, director, Whitman County Rural Library District

Erin Krake, director, Roslyn Public Library
Dean Marney, director, North Central Regional Library
Marilyn Mitchell, trustee, Jefferson County Library District
Carolynne Myall, president, Washington Library Association
Lethene Parks, former trustee, Stevens County Rural Library
Amory Peck, trustee, Whatcom County Library System
Deborah Reck, head of education, Tacoma Community House and citizen member, Library Council of Washington
Sam Reed, secretary of state, Office of the Secretary of State
Chris Skaugset, director, Longview Public Library
Jeanne Steffener, trustee, Sno-Isle Libraries
Audrey Stupke, former trustee, Orcas Island Library
Jan Walsh, state librarian, Washington State Library
Mike Wirt, director, Spokane County Library District
Bruce Ziegman, director, Fort Vancouver Regional Library
Marie Zimmermann, interim vice president for academic affairs, Highline Community College Library

Appendix B

Washington State Library and Consensus

Library Council of Washington

Serving as the advisory council on library development and the use of LSTA funding.

Eve Datisman, chair, Port Angeles High School, *School Libraries*

Harry Bruce and **Allyson Carlyle**, Information School, University of Washington, *Ex-Officio*

Kevin Comerford, Microsoft Corporation, *Information Technology*

Tim Fuhrman, Big Bend Community College, *Academic 2-Year Libraries*

Sherry Ann Hokanson, Fairchild Air Force Base Library, *Special Libraries*

Elizabeth Knight, University of Puget Sound, *Academic 4-Year Libraries*

Lisa A. Oberg, UW Health Sciences Library, *Special Libraries*

Lethene Parks (2006), *Rural Libraries*

Lillian Heytvelt (2007), Denny Ashby Library, *Rural Libraries*

Deborah L. Reck, Tacoma Community House, *Disadvantaged*

Chris Skaugset, Longview Public Library, *Public Libraries Under 100,000*

Rayette Sterling, Spokane Public Library, *Cultural Diversity*

Kevin Stevens, Seattle Public Library, *Information Technology*

Jan Walsh, Washington State Library, *Ex-Officio*

Jan Weber, *School Libraries*

Bruce Ziegman, Fort Vancouver Regional Library, *Public Libraries Over 100,000*

Washington State Library Staff

Jan Walsh, State Librarian

Rand Simmons, Library Development Program Manager

Karen Goettling, Assistant Program Manager

Jeff Martin, LSTA Administrator

Library Development staff

The Consensus team

Consensus is a non-profit firm located in Kansas City. For more information, see consensuskc.org. Consensus team members include:

Jennifer Wilding, project director and lead staff for Consensus

Saul Amdursky, Fraser Valley Regional Library, Abbotsford, BC

Therese Bigelow, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

Tom Hennen, Waukesha County Federated Library System, Waukesha, Wisconsin

Martha Kropf, Ph.D., University of North Carolina-Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina

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