



# **Libraries & Communities: Creating Excellent Libraries**

**A statewide plan for library  
development in Washington,  
2008-2012**

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

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

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

## **What is the context for this plan?**

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

### **Public libraries**

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

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



### **School libraries**

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

### **Academic libraries**

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

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

### **Special libraries**

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

### **The Washington State Library**

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

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

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

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



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An online survey for the LSTA five-year evaluation showed that the statewide database licensing project and the continuing education grants for individuals and libraries are the two highest visibility and most positively perceived LSTA-funded efforts. WSL brokers database licenses for constituent groups. It does not put any state or federal dollars into these licenses. WSL brokers a statewide database license to ProQuest on behalf of all non-profit libraries in the state. WSL subsidizes 50 percent of the license using federal LSTA funds.



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

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

## **How was this plan developed?**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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## **What major trends are expected to affect libraries?**

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

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

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

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## **What common values should guide Washington libraries?**

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

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

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

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## **Vision One**

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

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

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

As a result of communications with library leaders, state legislators see the benefits of funding a statewide library card and a basic menu of databases. Libraries are also reaching out to Washington corporations in new and creative ways, offering funding and sponsorship opportunities. And, libraries have adjusted their own budgets so that local communities contribute proportionately to resources available to everyone in the state.

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

A statewide library card would require a statewide reciprocal borrowing agreement among and between all libraries in Washington State.

##### **Strategies:**

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

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

The one-stop shop would include a statewide union catalog, a bibliographic database that records the holdings of many libraries. A single search in a union catalog reveals which libraries hold a specific title.

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**Strategies:**

- Generate data, including research on best practices in other states, available grants, and options for software and hardware.
- Create a definition of the catalog standard, involving individual libraries in IT interface design and management.
- Obtain start-up and sustaining funding from LSTA, the state legislature, and libraries.

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

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

**Strategies:**

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

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## **Vision Two:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Strategies:**

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

### **Goal: The library is and is seen as the foundation of democracy and intellectual freedom.**

#### **Strategies:**

- Provide resources in multiple formats relating to democracy and intellectual freedom.

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

**Goal: Libraries have mutually beneficial partnerships with community organizations.**

**Strategies:**

- Identify existing data on community needs, or conduct surveys of community members and library customers to generate that data.
- Identify potential partners and work with them to develop projects that meet community needs.
- Implement partnerships, evaluate progress and refine partnerships.

**Goal: Libraries and businesses have mutually beneficial partnerships.**

Libraries provide specialized information to the business community, and businesses and libraries operate shared ventures in libraries.

**Strategies – specialized information for the business community:**

- Meet with existing business organizations, or convene local businesses, to identify the various information needs that could be met through partnerships with libraries.
- Survey businesses to identify research training that they need beyond basic library services, and provide specialized training to business staff for a financial contribution or in return for an in-kind donation.

**Strategies – shared ventures operated within the library:**

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

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## **Vision Three:**

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

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

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

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

#### **Goal: Libraries are multi-use centers of the community.**

##### **Strategies:**

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

#### **Goal: Community members are involved in designing libraries and library services.**

##### **Strategies:**

- Identify locations for teen library pilot projects.
- At each location, pull together a policy board of teens and adults and establish goals and outcomes.
- Identify potential library sites and seek partnerships with groups that could provide services on site.

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## **Vision Four:**

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

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

Libraries do more than listen. They take action based upon what they hear. They found, for example, that they already provide some services that non-users want but didn't know were available, so libraries got the word out using non-technical language. They also got some great ideas for improving existing services, and found unmet needs that provided opportunities for targeting niche markets.

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

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

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

#### **Strategies:**

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

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## **Vision Five:**

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Strategies:**

- Develop a universal definition of “information literacy” and identify critical thinking learning outcomes at stages of the pre-kindergarten through graduate school educational system.
- Conduct research on best practices, develop a framework for collaboration at the local level, and create public information materials about information literacy and critical thinking as important life skills.
- Generate statewide review and adoption of the definitions, outcomes, and framework for collaboration.
- Develop regional teams to implement the framework, and assess and revise the results.

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

**Strategies:**

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

**Goal: Libraries are leaders in early childhood education.**

**Strategies:**

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

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## **Vision Six:**

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

In 2012, a new group of librarians are entering library school and starting jobs at libraries throughout Washington. These information specialists, from various racial and ethnic groups, were introduced to library service through outreach to high school and undergraduate students that began back in 2007. That's when librarians realized that many librarians were nearing retirement, and that they had an opportunity to assure that new library staff members more closely reflect Washington's changing population.

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

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

### **Goal: Libraries provide services targeted to racial/ethnic groups in their communities.**

#### **Strategies:**

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

### **Goal: More non-white high school and undergraduate students choose information science as their careers.**

#### **Strategies:**

- Conduct focus groups with high school and undergraduate students at locations around Washington State to determine what would make a career in library and information science attractive to them.
- Based upon the results, create and implement a plan to move non-white stu-

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dents towards careers in library and information science.

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

**Strategies:**

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

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## **Vision Seven:**

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

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

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

#### **Goal: Library staff members are hired for their excellent customer service skills.**

##### **Strategies:**

- Identify customer-service traits and develop ways to determine which job applicants possess those traits.
- Provide up-to-date, regular training in customer service.
- Involve staff members in identifying ways to improve customer service and reward staff members for going above and beyond.

#### **Goal: Libraries have sufficient staff members to meet statewide service standards.**

##### **Strategies:**

- Gather data on service standards and adopt statewide standards for levels of service.
- Use statistics and stories to demonstrate the need for libraries to meet the service standards.

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## **Vision Eight:**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Goal: Citizens support spending sufficient tax dollars for public libraries.**

#### **Strategies:**

- Coordinate with marketing efforts to craft a common message about the financial needs of and value provided by public libraries.
- Encourage advocacy by library supporters, such as Friends members, students, local government and seniors.

### **Goal: State funds help pay for resources that are shared statewide, such as the statewide library card and online databases.**

#### **Strategies:**

- Craft a common message from all library and education associations focusing on the demonstrated value of shared statewide resources.
- Provide training in advocacy for librarians and key volunteer leaders.

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

**Strategies:**

- Promote partnerships between public and school libraries designed to raise public awareness of the value of investments in libraries.
- Identify an adequate per capita or mill levy rate for funding of public/municipal and school libraries.
- Provide cost estimate to state legislature and governor.

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

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