



# **The Landscape for Change**

## **Executive Summary**

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

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

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

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

A few key points are worth mentioning:

- For almost every weakness or threat that people identified, somebody somewhere in Washington has found a way to solve it. We've included success stories, drawn from interviews, which provide a sense of what others are doing to turn problems into opportunities.
- The environment within which all libraries operate has become more competitive and libraries can no longer count on stakeholders seeing them as valuable. Librarians from libraries of all types talked about intense competition for funding in tight economic conditions. Librarians also recognized that they needed to make a strong case for their libraries in a culture in which civic values like the common good are eroding and in which people think "It's all on the Internet."
- Interview subjects saw marketing as a major weakness of libraries. Given that, we were surprised to find that many fewer saw marketing as an opportunity or, in the survey, said that marketing was something for which they wanted to receive training.
- The public sees Internet search engines as the major competition for libraries and a surprisingly high percentage – about 65% - said they wanted the library of the future to have a website with quick and easy access to reliable digital information. Interview subjects said that library databases are very difficult to use, and several said that libraries should be more assertive in asking vendors to provide a better

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*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

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product. None mentioned asking vendors to provide marketing support.

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

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*“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

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## **What are the national trends?**

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

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

### **Social and economic issues**

- *The library as space.* Libraries are being reconfigured as gathering spaces for people, with more space for people and technology and less space for books.
- *The funding of libraries.* School librarians are not considered essential members of the learning team in many places and school boards rarely provide enough funding

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for the up-to-date books required for accreditation. Academic and special libraries compete with other departments for funding. Providing new technology and training library staff to use it strains the budgets of many libraries.

- *Advocacy for and marketing of libraries.* The public is aware of traditional services, but libraries have a hard time marketing databases and other electronic resources, and the public tends not to use librarians as a source of information.
- *Issues of privacy and confidentiality.* Librarians fought the Patriot Act, which did away with due process protections. They face challenges from some state lawmakers over the privacy and confidentiality of library records.
- *Legal actions and controversies.* Libraries face conflicts related to books, Internet access, social networking, and the question of who is entitled to service.

### **Library services and staff**

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

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*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

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entire operation of the library.

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

## **What is the situation at the state level?**

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

### **The Washington State Library**

The Washington State Library [WSL], housed within the Office of the Secretary of State, works in partnership with advisory committees to plan and implement programs, provide training, grants, and consulting services for all public and 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% 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 na-

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*"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

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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% 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.

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

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

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

### **Public libraries**

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

Public library directors are positioning themselves to become key players in the early childhood arena, in response to Governor Gregoire's establishment of a Department

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*"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

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of Early Learning. Subgroups of public library directors are working on issues of state funding for a virtual library and renewed discussion of a statewide library card.

### **School libraries**

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

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### **Academic libraries**

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

The 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.

*"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

### **Special libraries**

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

## **What is the situation for the libraries of Washington State?**

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

### **Interviews with library staff and volunteer leaders**

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

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

### **Strengths identified by interview subjects**

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

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

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

### **Strengths identified by the Library Council of Washington**

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

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

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*One library provides home delivery, which is cost-effective because the area served is so large that book-mobiles 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 percent on-time return rate."*

Comment from large public library

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- There is some practice of resource sharing and a desire to expand the practice.

### **Weaknesses identified by interview subjects**

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

- **Marketing (22 mentions, 35% of responses).** Libraries fall short in putting the customer at the center, getting out into the community and reaching non-users.
- **Collections (10 mentions, 16% of responses).** Libraries fall short in accessibility and convenience of collections, and in offering current materials and bestsellers.
- **Online resources and new technology.** (9 mentions, 15% of responses). The complexity of libraries' online databases is a weakness, as is adopting new technology.
- **The physical space (7 mentions, 11% of responses).** Libraries fall short in offering enough and the right hours and providing a comfortable environment.

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

Comment from large public library

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

### **Weaknesses identified by the Library Council of Washington**

LCW members identified the following weaknesses, not duplicated by either the interviews or surveys:

- No statewide library card.
- Fragmented interlibrary loan.
- Very little development of shared integrated library automation systems.
- Inadequate band-width penetration statewide.
- No funding to support broad-based resource sharing.

### **Threats identified by interview subjects**

The key word was "relevance" when people talked about the major threats facing their libraries, such as the Internet, competition for tax dollars, and a public that no longer assumes that libraries are valuable. Each interview subject was invited to offer three threats.

- **The Internet (12 mentions, 14% of responses).** The idea that "It's all on the

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Internet” was perceived as a threat by the most interview subjects.

- **Funding (10 mentions, 12% of responses).** Libraries are threatened by competition for public dollars and problems with the property tax and initiative process.
- **Support (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** Building community, school and organizational support for libraries is seen as increasingly vital as people are less likely to assume that libraries add value.
- **Staffing (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** Not being able to attract enough and the right staff members by providing adequate salaries, recruiting diverse and multi-lingual staff members, and, for teacher-librarians, dealing with the deprofessionalization of the profession.
- **Legislative issues (8 mentions, 9% of responses).** The Washington Assessment of Student Learning is seen as a threat to school libraries, as teachers focus more on the test and less on research. Another state-level threat is lack of state funding for libraries.

*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

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

### **Threats identified by the Library Council of Washington**

The LCW identified these threats, not mentioned elsewhere:

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

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## Opportunities identified by interview subjects

Each interview subject was invited to offer three opportunities.

- **Niche markets (15 mentions, 21% of responses).** Early learning, services to seniors, businesses, life-long learners, students and immigrants were all cited as promising niche markets for public libraries. Teacher-librarians mentioned services to subgroups of students, such as those doing classroom-based assessment projects and seniors completing a senior culminating project.
- **Digital information and technology (12 mentions, 16% of responses).** The promise of new technology, digital collections, online databases, the opportunity to bridge the digital divide, and open-source software were seen as opportunities.
- **Reference services (10 mentions, 14% of responses).** The vast amount of information available online provides opportunities to help people manage it and make it easier to find, to provide instruction in information literacy, and to provide customized information.
- **Libraries as the center of communities (8 mentions, 11% of responses).** Libraries have the opportunity to serve as gathering places for the public, students, and other users, and to help drive a community's development.

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*"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

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

## Opportunities identified by the Library Council of Washington

LCW members identified the following opportunities:

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

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## What interviews identified as the most important result of a shared vision

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

- **Communities view libraries as relevant and necessary (10 mentions; 31% of responses).** The key to relevance was seen as meeting the needs of each community, recognizing that how that looks will vary from place to place.
- **Citizens have a statewide library card and/or virtual library (10 mentions; 31% of responses).** Respondents recognized the challenges of a statewide library card, but said it could help with marketing and serving unserved or remote areas. The virtual library was seen as a way to level the information playing field.

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

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

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

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

## Service challenges

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

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

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*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

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## Technology and digital resources

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

### Training

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

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*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

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

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

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

## What is the public's perspective on libraries?

Consensus crafted an online survey with a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions, and asked librarians to invite their users to complete it. Of the 283 users who did:

- 92.6% used public libraries most often,
- 4.2% used college/university libraries,
- 2.5% used school libraries, and
- 0.4% each used a government or other library.

Not surprisingly, survey respondents were heavy users. Two-thirds said they used the library weekly or daily. Past research – in particular, the OCLC study – indicated that “borrowing print books, researching specific reference books and getting assistance with research” were the top three activities at the library for their survey respondents. Responses from the Washington users parallel those results:

- “Check(ing) out books, videos or CDs in English” was the major activity reported,

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with about 90% of respondents reporting they did this frequently.

- Nearly 60% indicated they asked staff reference questions occasionally to frequently.
- Libraries are in-and-out activities for slightly more than half of respondents, who say they rarely to never read or study there.
- About 60% indicated that they rarely to never use the library for career or job information.
- Two-thirds reported that they used library computers occasionally to frequently.
- Three-fourths said they rarely or never use the history/genealogy materials, and two-thirds said they rarely or never attend meetings, classes or other events at the library.

### **Libraries online**

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

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

Relatively few persons, just 21.3%, use the website to ask a reference question. But people do use the Internet, despite not using the “ask-a-librarian” feature that many libraries offer. Some 45% said they search the Internet when they need information, one-third help themselves at the library, about 14% search the library website and one-tenth say they ask a librarian.

Respondents acknowledged their preference for Internet searching by identifying search engines as the main competition for libraries, at 46.3%.

### **User satisfaction**

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

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*“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

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much smaller percentage of dissatisfied customers was unhappy with collections and staff. Respondents were invited to suggest 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").*

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

### What is unique about libraries?

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

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

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

### Libraries in the future

The final set of questions was designed to identify important needs libraries must meet in

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

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

### **Current and future support**

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

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

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