

Designing Our Future, A Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries

In 1996, the Washington State Advisory Council on Libraries (WSACL) recommended to the WSLC the joint development of a long-range Statewide Plan for libraries based on the recommendations from the 1991 Washington State Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services. At this conference, over 100 delegates from around the state forged 12 recommendations to address the most critical issues facing libraries in the nineties:

1. Access For All – Remove barriers to service, reaching out and connecting all parts of the community to programs and services.
2. Basic Literacy – Serve as catalysts for community literacy partnerships in order to ensure that services meet the literacy needs of the community.
3. Fitting libraries into the information technology revolution – Work towards an electronic information network that will link state, regional, and local networks into a virtual national and international library, accessible to all. Provide for information technology within libraries, develop standards to ensure compatibility among systems, and increase information literacy among users.
4. Life-Long Learning – Encourage life-long learning by providing a neutral ground and stimulating learning opportunities. Determine programming in cooperation with local groups. Involve well-trained staff with resources sufficient to meet community needs.
5. Services to Children – Form coalitions among community, public library and school officials to remove barriers preventing all children and youth from access to library services. Implement cooperative networking of resources and enhancement of programs to provide access to relevant information in a nurturing and positive environment.
6. Information Literacy – Cooperatively provide program, services, and staff adequate to develop, support, and cultivate critical thinking and an information literate public.
7. Marketing and Competition – Educate users to available library resources such that libraries are viewed as user friendly, significant sources of information and services.
8. National Information Policy – Create a framework for national information policy encompassing issues related to libraries and information services, such as intellectual freedom, access for all, lifelong-learning, information literacy, and technology policy.
9. Organized Censorship Groups – Oppose censorship efforts by organized groups to continue protection of intellectual principles and to preserve library resources.
10. Training – Provide for the quality education of librarians and staff. Provide a coordinated education and training program which expands current programs, improves quality, and broadens access for library staff statewide.
11. Cultural Diversity – Develop and encourage cultural diversity programs in libraries and ensure a consistent message is delivered to the community about their need and value.
12. Censorship – Maintain open access to information necessary to educate a diverse population.

A Statewide Action Committee on Libraries and Information Services further investigated these recommendations and developed strategies for implementing them providing the basis for the Statewide Plan.

The Statewide Plan served two purposes. The plan would provide: 1) a mutually agreed upon plan for future development of libraries in Washington; and 2) the basis from which the details of the LSTA Five-Year Plan could be extracted.

An initial “framework document” was developed by WSACL and WSLC. The process was then expanded to gather input from library personnel and supporters around the state. Input and ideas were gathered through a series of regional forums held in Bellingham, Seattle, Olympia, Vancouver, Spokane, Yakima, and Walla Walla. A professional facilitator conducted the forums in spring 1997. A video conference was later held at several sites for the library community to review and comment on the draft Statewide Plan, to develop ideas about how the strategies could be implemented, and to suggest which groups should take the lead in implementation. The draft Statewide Plan was distributed to all forum participants as well as the larger library community for review and comment prior to a final version being forwarded to the WSLC for consideration and adoption. *Designing Our Future, A Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries*, was adopted by the WSLC on July 18, 1997.

Designing Our Future incorporated nine visions for library service to the people of Washington state:

1. The opportunity and ability to use library resources in the state regardless of where they as individuals live or work.
2. Improved library and information services through widespread cooperative sharing of resources.
3. Access to ideas and information in a variety of formats, balancing print and electronic resources.
4. The opportunity and ability to seek, analyze, evaluate, and use information they need.
5. Universal access to global information through the Internet and other electronic resources.
6. Customer-centered library services, facilities, programs, and materials that are responsive to community needs.
7. Equity of access regardless of culture, language, literacy level, age, ability, economics, and geography.
8. Access to information through a physical library and a “virtual” library that is electronically connected to the universe of information and knowledge.
9. Appreciation for the value of libraries, library employees, and supporters.

To achieve the vision incorporated within the Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries, six goals were adopted, stating that the Washington library community will:

1. Meet customers’ needs and continuously improve customer services.
2. Improve their customers’ access to library service and resources.
3. Pursue technical solutions to service challenges through a combination of statewide leadership and local efforts, as appropriate.
4. Use coalitions to develop new services, coordinate existing services, and share resources.

5. Strive for a balance between statewide leadership and local initiative appropriate to each issue. For some issues, local leadership and solutions are appropriate; for others, statewide; for still others, leadership may be shared.
6. Inspire a passionate interest and support for libraries.

In 2000, the LCW chose to revise *Designing Our Future* rather than conduct a new process for 2002–2007. As a result, the 2002–2007 plan builds on the initial discussions of the library community contained within the first Statewide Plan. Additional ideas, opinions, and suggestions from the library community for revision of the Statewide Plan were gathered using three methods:

1. An electronic survey of library staff and trustees of all types of libraries was conducted from June through September 2000. This survey sought to identify what had been accomplished, what remained to be accomplished, and what new issues had come to light since the 1997 Statewide Plan was originally adopted.
2. Four regional forums held in Edmonds, Olympia, Spokane, and Yakima during October and November 2000. These forums were intended to identify the expectations that staff and customers had for libraries in the future, the priority of each expectation, and what would need to occur for libraries to meet the highest priorities.
3. Two interactive videoconference forums held in Bremerton, Ellensburg, Kennewick, Lacey, Mt Vernon, Vancouver, and Wenatchee held during October and November 2000. The purpose of the videoconferences was similar to the regional forums.

Over 150 people responded with comments, suggestions, and ideas through these opportunities. This plan was reviewed by LCW at various stages of development and was distributed to the library community for further comment. A recommendation for adoption was passed at the Council's July 12, 2001 meeting. The plan was adopted by the WSLC at their September 12, 2001 business meeting.

The vision for the 2002–2007 Statewide Plan is very similar to that of the 1997 Statewide Plan stating that the people of Washington will have:

1. Customer-centered library resources, services, and facilities that are responsive to community needs.
2. The opportunity to use library resources and services regardless of cultural background, language, literacy level, age, ability, income level, or geographic location.
3. Access to ideas and information in a variety of formats, balancing print and electronic resources, with a focus on the most appropriate methods and mediums.
4. Improved library and information services through widespread cooperative sharing of resources.
5. The opportunity and ability to learn about, evaluate, and use information they need.
6. Access to information through both physical and virtual libraries electronically connected to the universe of information and knowledge.

To achieve the vision incorporated within the Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries, four goals (1-4) and three strategies (5-7) were adopted. These state that the library community in Washington will work to:

1. Increase the ability of the people of Washington to learn how to use and access integrated online resources and services on a 24-hour basis.
2. Increase the appreciation, support, and awareness of library resources and services.
3. Increase the ability of the people of Washington to have access to library resources and services in all areas of the state.
4. Ensure that libraries of Washington have resources and services that meet the needs of all segments of their communities.
5. Coordinate, collaborate, and partner with each other and other groups for increased effectiveness.
6. Support library staff in gaining the knowledge and skill to provide quality service to their customers.
7. Have stable and adequate funding to provide effective library service.