

January 2001

Strategic Directions for the Washington State Library

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2000 Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy “to study the mission, programs, and usage of the state library.” It further required that this work be coordinated with the Department of General Administration’s space utilization study.

Key questions for this study were:

- Are there options for redefining the roles and functions of the Washington State Library (WSL)?
- What value can the WSL add to the delivery of information to the legislature and state government agencies?
- Is the current location of the WSL on the capitol campus essential to its effective operation?

Information Needs

WSL’s mission is to provide state government with public policy documents and information and to support policy research for state employees. The study revealed the following themes regarding information needs:

- Information users want information delivered to their desktops, or minimally to their offices.
- Many information users, including legislative staff, need the most current information available, especially during a legislative session when information is needed immediately.
- Researchers and scientists generally have a longer timeline to complete studies and projects. But, they need access to a wide variety of policy and scientific journals and materials that are only now available through interlibrary loan.
- In order for these information needs to be met, the WSL must implement its strategic plan for 2000–2004.

Major Findings

- While WSL's mission remains sound, the ways in which information is delivered to the legislature and state agencies needs to change significantly. One option is for WSL to facilitate agency libraries that are more specifically suited to the various work environments.
- WSL can add value to the effective delivery of information by purchasing, or facilitating the purchase, of online content.
- WSL can also add value by offering services, including reference services and training, that are based on sound business practices.
- WSL has taken notable steps to accommodate users' new information needs, but more progress is needed, especially in purchasing online content.
- The WSL book collection is significantly out of date.
- It is not necessary for the WSL to remain on the capitol campus to effectively deliver information to state government.

Recommendations

- Accelerate the move from print to online content by joining a larger purchasing unit with the publicly funded academic libraries.
- Focus WSL's activities more sharply than they are today. Implementing a limited market system by instituting fees for service would help clarify the relative value of services for users.
- Implement a more aggressive book "weeding" campaign.
- Reduce the physical presence of WSL on the capitol campus and develop more appropriate space for technical and service functions elsewhere. One option is to locate a reference and information services desk on the capitol campus (perhaps co-located with State Archives), and a public reading room with materials from the current Washington Room.