

Pierce County Library System

National Medal for Museum and Library Service Nomination

B. Statement of Purpose/Mission Statement & Brief Institutional History

Pierce County Library System's (PCLS) 18 libraries and online library are the community's place and provide children and adults with opportunities to learn and enrich their lives.

Mission and Vision: Every day the library and its engaged and enthusiastic staff fulfill PCLS's mission to "bring the world of information and imagination to all people of our community" and to move the library and the people it serves closer to PCLS's vision "to be the community's choice for the discovery and exchange of information and ideas."

PCLS focuses on its customers and engages with the community to deliver this vision and provide outstanding up-to-date customer service and technology, based upon the community's needs. Despite budget reductions since 2010, PCLS continues to meet the current expectations of customers and places their needs at the forefront of decision-making.

Engaging the community and connecting with the lives of residents is instrumental to the library's success. PCLS develops partnerships to maximize library resources and reach further constituents. PCLS involves citizens directly in decision-making and planning, including guiding the library's decision for a successful public vote on a tax levy. The library regularly conducts market research to help guide priorities and understand public opinions.

History/Governance: In 1946, PCLS was established as an independent municipal corporation and junior taxing district, funded from a separate property tax levy on real property. Today, PCLS serves 555,000 people across a 1,773 square mile service area, spanning unincorporated Pierce County and 15 annexed cities, where residents voted to pay taxes for library service. A five-member volunteer Board of Trustees, appointed by the County Executive, governs the library. Since 1980, the service area has experienced great change, with three cities voting to annex into the library system, and the landscape transforming from rural to suburban. Pierce County is home to the West Coast's largest military installation: Joint Base Lewis McChord.

Demographics: Since 1980, PCLS's population has exploded with an 89% increase. The majority of residents are 40-54 (22%) and 0-14 (21%). The racial/ethnic mix of residents includes Caucasian (78%), with 9% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 5% Asian. It has a 9% unemployment rate; the highest rate in the Puget Sound area of Washington. More than 11% of the residents live below the national poverty level, with 42% of students enrolled in the national free and reduced lunch program. Nearly 15% of households report speaking a language other than English at home.

The Library System has 258,000 card holders, many of whom are card holders representing entire families. Circulation has increased by 702% since 1980. In 2011 customers checked out 8,534,808 items, made 2,631,464 visits to libraries, and visited the online library 2,926,874 times.