

**Pierce County Library System**  
**National Medal for Museum and Library Service Nomination**  
**C. Narrative**

**1. Community: Target population groups/communities; partnerships; needs identified:** Pierce County Library System determines its priorities and services by making thoughtful and forward-looking choices based on public opinion research, conversations with community members, analysis of community trends, and input and understanding gained through community partnerships.

**A. Children:** Children ages 0-14 represent 21% of PCLS's overall service area population; 37% of households have children under age 18; 42% of children receive free or reduced lunch. PCLS is a leader in early learning throughout the county and state. In 2000, with new information from brain research, PCLS identified the importance of the library role in early learning. In 2001, the library received a LSTA grant to design early learning services in partnership with the Health Department by working with parents and childcare providers to deliver early literacy programs, which has developed into an ongoing program.

PCLS participates in a county-wide partnership created by United Way: First Five FUNDamentals, which coordinates and plans county-wide early learning services. To help ensure library programs meet community needs staff serves on early learning councils, including Pierce County Linkages, Early Headstart Advisory Board, and Washington Early Learning Steering Committee. PCLS's Executive Director serves on the Washington State Birth to 12 Literacy Team.

**B. Job Seekers and Small Businesses:** 91% of businesses in Pierce County are small businesses; Pierce County ranks 13th in startups and failures of small businesses nationwide; 9% unemployment rate. When the economy began to turn, job seekers poured into PCLS seeking help finding jobs, PCLS identified customer needs and provided basic computer skills; access to computers; support for filing job applications; writing resumes and cover letters; and resources to start small businesses. In partnership with WorkSource, librarians conduct computer classes in locations outside of the library buildings.

**C. English as a Second Language Speakers-Diverse Communities Service:** Residents that speak a language other than English at home has grown from approximately 6% in 1990 to 15% in 2012. With a LSTA grant in 2003, PCLS embarked on an extensive needs assessment for people who speak English as a second language, focused on the major languages spoken of Spanish and Korean. PCLS sponsored focus groups with individuals from each community to determine service needs and worked in partnership with community organizations to deliver services, including Korean Women's Association and Centro Latino.

**D. Military Personnel and Families:** Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) occupies 136 square miles of Pierce County, making it the largest military installation on the West Coast, along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest employer in Washington State and the largest employer in the county. Since 2003, the population of JBLM in soldiers and civilian personnel grew by 43% to 51,000. The associated family members grew by 77% to 53,000. PCLS's Executive Director participated in the JBLM Growth Coordination Planning Process focused on community support for the base. PCLS worked with on-base and off-base partners to identify strategies to support the military. JBLM has a special need designation for military families with high needs kids to be stationed

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in Pierce County, due to the county's high quality of services available for high needs children. As a result, PCLS and other organizations serve a high percentage of the families with special needs children.

**E. Active Older Adults: 50+ program:** In 2008, PCLS identified that the 60+ age population in Pierce County had nearly doubled in the past three decades, following a national trend, and that the population was expected to grow by 132% in the next 20 years. PCLS received a grant to assess the needs of this population and develop recommendations for service. It assessed population trends and demographics, conducted focus groups and surveys, and analyzed other information. PCLS worked with other organizations to form a collaboration of agencies to better serve people 50+.

**F. Residents of Fife:** Fife transformed from a rural to small industrial city without a public library. Fife School District is the most ethnically diverse district in Washington State. More than 9,000 residents live in Fife, many are Spanish speakers. In 2010, the community's major ethnic/racial groups were Caucasian (53%), Asian (16%), Hispanic/Latino (14%), American Indian (3%) and Pacific Islander (2%). After residents voted to annex into PCLS, staff introduced residents to library services with bookmobiles with Spanish speaking staff visiting apartment complexes and schools. During the first four hours the library was open 780 people visited the library, checked out 1,566 books and items, and 143 people got library cards. The library's opening day success continues with a strong, supportive response from the community, with checkouts per capita on track for 22% for the first year of operation.

**2. Programming: Examples of Programs/Services developed for target population groups/communities:** Consistent with PCLS's vision, programs and services are focused on the customer and the needs of communities and many are in partnership with other organizations to add value to communities. Program planning often includes testing services while in development, such as focus groups, to redirect planning, as needed. Examples of programs/services:

**A. Children:** As a result of the work with the Health Department and the local Childcare Resource and Referral, PCLS provides early literacy training to child care providers. In 2011, PCLS trained 904 child care providers earning providers continuing education credits. In 2011, 249 parents participated in Pierce County Library's early learning workshops. PCLS continues to provide learning book kits with books and CDs to 134 childcare centers and home daycare providers. PCLS works in partnership with other early learning organizations to provide trainings to parents. These groups include Mothers of Preschoolers, HeadStart, Early Childhood Assistance Programs, and local colleges. PCLS provides training to school district programs that help parents prepare their children for school.

At the beginning of First 5 FUNdamentals, grant funding supported a partnership with the Children's Museum to offer Play and Learn programs at five libraries. The successful program prompted PCLS to add a play component to story times, following the grant. In 2012, in partnership with First 5 FUNdamentals and Washington Dental Service Foundation, PCLS participated in the Oral Health Pilot Project. PCLS developed and produced an oral health

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booklist for families with children 0-5 years; created an oral health rhyme and song book; included oral health stories and messages in story times; and produced an oral health kit with puppets, books, songs, realia, games, and activities for child care providers.

**B. At-Risk Youth:** PCLS designed the Explorer Program for children living in low-income neighborhoods and identified as at-risk youth. PCLS partnered with three school districts with the lowest reading scores and highest number of free and reduced lunch students to support these at-risk students. PCLS worked with school teachers and librarians to provide books to students. This year, for the first time, through a pilot partnership with Franklin Pierce Schools, PCLS is issuing library cards to every student in the district and encouraging them to use online homework help and PCLS's online databases. Franklin Pierce Schools' students are in the most at-risk school district in the library's service area, with 70% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. With a grant from The Discuren Foundation, PCLS is helping to target library needs for low-income housing, school districts, Safe Streets, and other areas.

**C. Job and Business Centers:** With \$256,000 from seven generous grantors, PCLS created Job and Business Centers in six libraries: dedicated areas with computers and work spaces; books, materials, online resume help and job coaches; and trained and knowledgeable librarians. PCLS conducts computer classes in English in all libraries and computer classes in Spanish in some locations. In 2011 PCLS offered 421 computer classes, with a total of 3,571 participants. Computer classes include showing students how to use e-sources, which have grown in use with the classes: from 2,400 annual sessions to 90,000 sessions in 2011. The classes and instruction on e-sources have been critical in helping get people jobs and start small businesses. PCLS also offers workshops from professionals in the fields of employment, business, and finance.

**D. English as a Second Language:** Working with community agencies, PCLS identified Korean Women's Association (KWA) as an effective partner to reach the Korean community. PCLS takes books and movies to two KWA senior meal sites. PCLS offers ESL classes to introduce English learners to library resources. Staff visit classrooms, issue library cards, and introduce library services at three community college sites and at other community sites, which has been successful in bringing students to PCLS libraries.

**E. Joint Base Lewis McChord:** Based on the needs for military personnel and families, PCLS created a military website intended to help families new to the area. PCLS worked with JBLM to provide Job and Business classes and resources to help soldiers discharged from the military. In response to a JBLM request for support of soldiers' use of computers in PCLS libraries, PCLS worked with JBLM to install the technology needed for soldiers to access their email and base online accounts directly from library computers. This service was highly appreciated and JBLM plans to award PCLS with a special military coin.

**F. 50+:** To identify services for active older adults, PCLS conducted extensive surveys and interviews with residents and learned that social engagement and community discussions, learning and educational opportunities, keeping up with technology, and volunteerism were all important. In response, PCLS fashioned its services to meet these needs with author presentations, computer and technology classes, volunteer opportunities, book discussion

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groups, and retirement and estate planning, geared toward people 50+. Services for people 50+ include working with a number of community organizations who are involved directly with this age group. Annually, the partnership produces a conference for hundreds of people who are 50+ to engage them in community services available to them.

**3. Impact and Evaluation: Formal Evaluations, Meeting Community Needs, and Planning for Future Programs and Services:** PCLS conducts formal evaluations, often pre and post launches, to evaluate and improve upon major services and programs.

**A. Fife:** From 2008-2011 PCLS conducted extensive public involvement in the City of Fife to determine the community's interest and need for library service. PCLS created and implemented several communications strategies and plans and conducted significant public opinion research. From creating and conducting direct public opinion surveys to participating in public events, residents shared their needs and interests for library services. As a result, voters passed a measure with a 69% approval for the City of Fife to annex to PCLS for library service. Based upon public interest and need Fife Pierce County Library is one the first libraries in the state to be non-Dewey and organized by topics. Staff designed the library with customers in mind and created spaces and places for people to study and talk in groups as well as work and read quietly. The post opening survey showed: 88% of the respondents were very happy that their community had a public library and 85% said it was convenient and easy to check out books and other items.

**B. Early learning:** PCLS conducted research based on a grant from the Boeing Corporation and the Muckleshoot Tribe, and in collaboration with the University of Washington iSchool to test and evaluate the importance of training child care providers to prepare children to read. PCLS conducted research and then implemented a program; Our Children are Ready for Reading, for in-home childcare providers. The innovative study proved that providing caregivers with tools and training helps prepare children to read and makes a significant difference in their development. PCLS is continuing the program and training other in-home childcares. In 2011, Urban Libraries Council recognized the success of PCLS's early learning work with the Innovations Initiative Award for Literacy.

**C. DVD Services:** PCLS moved DVDs from on the shelf offerings to Red Box-type devices, to increase selections and reduce theft. Public surveys following the change showed 85% of survey respondents applauded the movie machines saying they found a good selection of DVDs in the machines. Of critical importance, 86% of respondents said the machines were easy to use for checking out DVDs; 74% said they were quick to use. Respondents found checking in DVDs very efficient with 94% of respondents saying it was easy and 88% saying it was quick. To help improve customers' DVD checkout experience, staff worked directly with customers to help them become more familiar and comfortable with the process.

**D. Reauthorized Levy:** In 2005-06 PCLS formed a community advisory committee, made up of community leaders, to examine a funding approach to meet communities' needs when costs to run the libraries were higher than revenues. In addition, PCLS conducted public opinion surveys, polls, and community meetings. With citizen input the community advisory committee

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recommended a reauthorized levy was needed to maintain and improve library services. With a 56% approval voters passed the levy and for the past six years PCLS has delivered on its pledges in the levy. PCLS worked with community organizations and individuals to determine the levy pledges, based upon services the public valued and needed. Those services included: increasing building open hours by 20%; expanding offerings of books and materials; adding services for children and teenagers; and improving technology and customer services.

**4. Financial Sustainability:** By Washington State law, PCLS may collect taxes on up to 50¢ per every \$1,000 of assessed property values. Property taxes fund approximately 96% of the library's budget, followed by fines and fees on overdue books and materials, and then donations and grants to Pierce County Library Foundation and Friends of Libraries. Due to declining property values, 2013 will mark the fourth year of reduced revenues, with a nearly 10% budget shortfall for a total of \$6.2 million in reductions in the past four years. In spite of sustaining major budget cuts, PCLS continues to put the taxpayer first in decision-making, with no reductions in major direct services. During this time, PCLS has created new innovative services to meet customer needs, such as the Job and Business Centers and programs and services for Joint Base Lewis McChord. For the first time, in 2013 PCLS plans to reduce its book budget, determining targeted reductions based on customer use and feedback.

In anticipation of the 2013 shortfall, PCLS sought to understand which services the public valued the most by conducting public opinion research using a direct mail and phone call survey of 950 residents, and it facilitated three focus groups with adults and teenagers. Survey results showed people valued: reading; learning, in particular early learning; helping students succeed in school; providing customer service; and offering an online library.

**Private/non-profit groups supporting PCLS:** Pierce County Library Foundation is an independent non-profit and the philanthropic affiliate of PCLS. The Foundation provides funding through gifts and grants from individuals, businesses, and foundations to support literacy and outreach services. For example, KeyBank has been the major sponsor for Pierce County READS one book-one community program for the past five years. In 2010, seven organizations provided \$256,000 in funding for Job and Business Centers and resources, including FRIENDS of Lakewood Library, Gary E. Milgard Family Foundation, Lucky Seven Foundation, The Norcliffe Foundation, Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Renew Washington grant program, administered by the Washington State Library and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and WorkForce-Central. Each year, the Summer Reading Program for children garners the private support of 12-15 local businesses. Additionally, more than 1,000 individuals make contribution through the Foundation's annual fund drive. Fundraising has increased by 130% during the past ten years. PCLS successfully led a furnishings and fixtures campaign for the opening of the University Place Library, and collected generous donations of more than \$670,000.

All 18 libraries have Friends groups that raise funds for events and furnishings, as well as advocate for libraries.