



***Strategic Plan for  
Timberland Regional Library  
2014-2018***

***Background documents:***

**Comparison of Timberland Regional Library  
and Four Multi-County Regional Libraries**

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## **Comparison of Timberland Regional Library and Four Multi-County Regional Libraries**

When engaging in strategic planning, administrators often compare their libraries' performance with others to analyze their libraries' strengths and weaknesses. Statistics about libraries are readily available; however, the challenge is to make sure that the comparable libraries are truly alike in important factors and that the measures compared are those that give the fullest picture of library service.

Another inherent problem with comparisons is that some view rankings as a contest among libraries, with the library, for example, with the highest number of items winning the collection round. Used in this way, comparisons may create competition, which takes the focus off planning. Another potential problem is using comparisons without understanding the context of libraries compared. For example, a library's service population might consist of those with limited education or those who must work multiple jobs allowing limited time to use library services and result in lower visits to a library than in other communities.

These challenges and problems provide difficulties, but the value of comparisons is worth the effort especially in a strategic planning process. Comparisons allow planners to view the library in context with its peers and to find out what peer libraries might be achieving. Planners can use this information to set objectives and goals in conjunction with information from the environmental scan and other data collection activities.

As mentioned above, two challenges are inherent in this comparison process. The first is which measures should be used to compare libraries. The second is which libraries to choose for the comparison.

Which measures should we use to compare libraries? Is the number of library items held by the library a measure of good service or the number of reference questions asked? Do we compare physical or virtual visits to the library? Unfortunately, there is no consensus on one way to measure library performance. However, librarians have begun to accept an emerging methodology called the Star Rating System, developed by Keith Curry Lance and Ray Lyons. In its fifth year, this measurement tool compares public libraries on the qualities of services they deliver.

However, a problem with using the Star methodology is the lack of measurement of new and developing library services. The authors acknowledge this problem in the last Star Library report<sup>1</sup>, noting that a national consensus has not yet emerged on what more relevant measures should track new and developing library services. Authors point out that the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the

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<sup>1</sup> Library Journal. 2013. Untitled. [online] Available at: <http://.libraryjournal.com/2012/11/managing-libraries/lj-index/class-of-2012/americas-star-libraries-2012-top-rated-libraries/> [Accessed: 4 Sep 2013].

federal agency responsible for collecting public library statistics, has not adopted new measures. Therefore, although library service has changed dramatically over the past 10 years, the profession also has yet to figure out ways to measure new services, such as counts of Wi-Fi use, and newly developed ways to access library services, such as mobile applications.

The Star System uses the following four “per capita” output measures:

- Circulation per capita
- Visits per capita
- Public Internet Computer Use per capita
- Program Attendance per capita

Curry and Lyons assert that input measures, such as revenues and collections, do not measure library performance. Instead, they believe that the four measures listed above are the best indicators of library performance, because these measures reflect the library services that people use. They also found that these four per capita service output measures were closely related statistically. Curry and Lyons state that per capita measures the reliable prevalence of library services and use compared with the population served and that using per capita allows comparisons among libraries serving communities of different sizes.

The second challenge in making library comparisons is selecting the libraries to compare. The 2011 Washington State Library’s annual statistical report is the most recent source of library data for Washington’s libraries. Because the multi-county regional structure is significantly different from single city or county libraries, we first selected multi-county regional systems to compare to TRL. After selecting these libraries, we further refined the line by choosing those libraries most similar to TRL in the revenue from local sources and the number of branches. Using these criteria, the following libraries are included in this comparison.

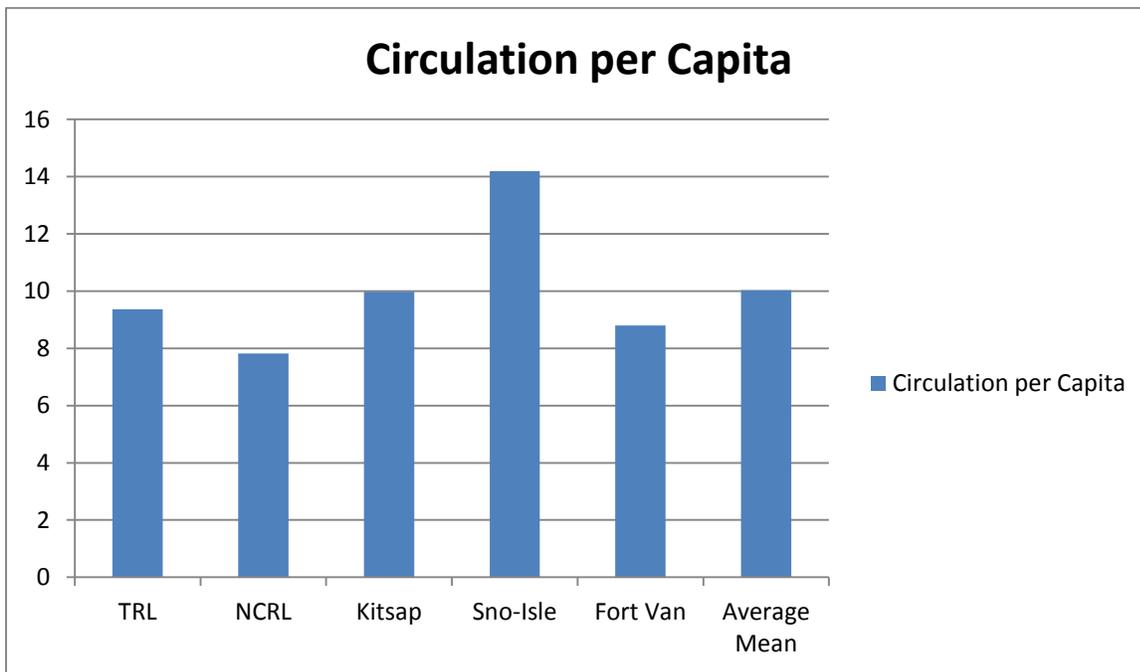
<b>Library</b>	<b>Local Revenue</b>	<b>Branches</b>	<b>Service Population</b>
<b>Timberland Regional Library (TRL)</b>	<b>\$17,645,273</b>	<b>27</b>	473,735
Fort Vancouver Regional Library District (Fort Van)	\$20,295,120	13	447,735
Kitsap Regional Library (Kitsap)	\$9,419,751	8	253,900
North Central Regional Library (NCRL)	\$10,018,034	27	248,485
Sno-Isle Libraries (Sno-Isle)	\$36,772,214	21	675,260

We compared TRL to each of these libraries using the Star methodology’s four output measures; the charts below contain the comparison data.

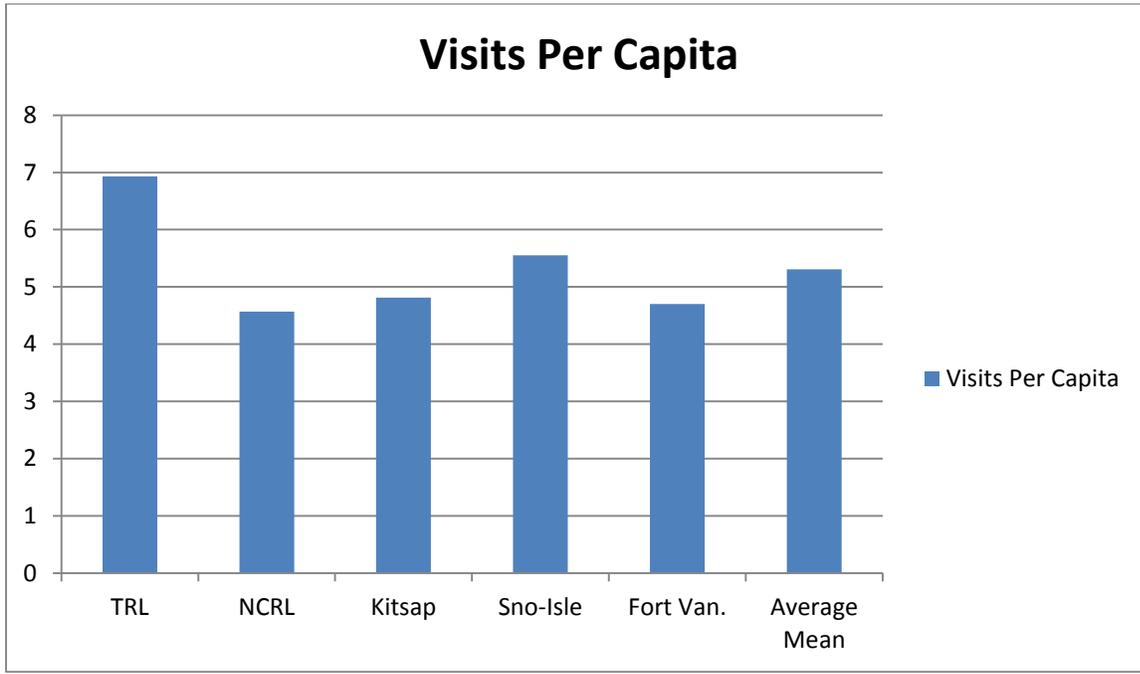
<b>Library</b>	<b>Circulation Per Capita</b>	<b>Visits Per Capita</b>	<b>Program Attendance Per Capita</b>	<b>Public Internet Computer Use</b>
<b>Timberland Regional Library (TRL)</b>	<b>9.37</b>	<b>6.93</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>534,193</b>
Fort Vancouver Regional Library District (Fort Van)	8.80	4.70	0.32	54,178
Kitsap Regional Library (Kitsap)	9.98	4.81	0.36	NR
North Central Regional Library (NCRL)	7.82	4.57	0.23	463,965
Sno-Isle Libraries (Sno-Isle)	14.19	5.55	0.35	NR
Average Mean	10.03	5.31	0.28	
<b>TRL Difference from the Mean</b>	<b>-0.66</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	

The following charts and discussions provide more detail about the performance measures and their possible impacts on planning.

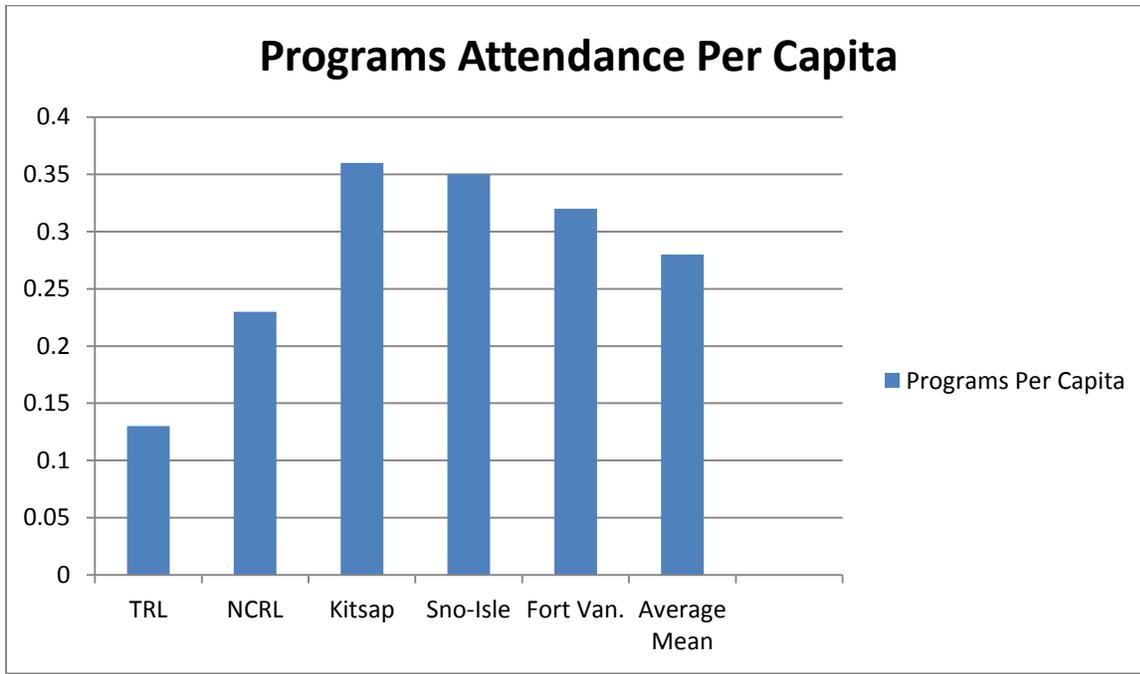
**Circulation Per Capita:** Although TRL is below the mean on this measure, the performance of Sno-Isle skews the mean higher. An investigation into the high performance of Sno-Isle might be warranted to find why that system has six fewer branches and fewer visits per capita than TRL. Questions to ask include: Are their collections substantially different and, if so, how? Do they have shorter circulation time spans? (Note: Sno-Isle allows 5 renewals of checked out items; TRL allows 3.) Do their communities have overall higher education levels than the communities in TRL which can influence the circulation of items?



Visits per Capita: TRL’s performance is above the mean in this measure, which demonstrates that community members are visiting their libraries for a variety of reasons. However, TRL is close to its peer libraries (except for Sno-Isle) in circulation per capita and in program attendance per capita, so the high number of visits may be due to the use of the computers and the availability of Wi-Fi in TRL’s branches.



Programs Attendance per Capita: TRL’s performance is below the mean on this measure and this difference merits attention. In particular, what can TRL learn from Kitsap’s high attendance? Kitsap has only eight branches and almost half of TRL’s revenue from local sources. Is the difference due to the type of programs they offer, or how they publicize the programs, or the way that staff members plan and execute programs? TRL could investigate programming plans in peer libraries to learn what works well in a multi-county, rural system.



Uses of Public Internet Computers: Unfortunately, we cannot make valid peer comparisons for this measure as two comparable libraries did not report this measure and Fort Vancouver’s data looks like an error given this library’s other performance information. We encourage TRL to look at the next year’s report (2012) to ascertain their performance in this measure in relation to their peer libraries.