

# Counting on Results

New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

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# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Executive Summary .....	vi
1 ☉ Introduction .....	1
2 ☉ Review of Literature.....	3
3 ☉ Methodology.....	18
Recruiting .....	18
Advisory Committee .....	19
Key Informant Interviews .....	20
Instrumentation Design.....	21
Data Collection .....	23
4 ☉ Measuring Library Output .....	26
Key Design Elements .....	26
Data Quality Caveats .....	27
Recorded Library Output Results.....	28
Overall Observed Activities Results .....	31
Individual Results .....	34
Observed Activities by Location .....	40
Observed Activities Results by Age Group .....	43
5 ☉ Measuring User Outcomes .....	49
Overall Results.....	49
Individual Library Results .....	58
Overall Results by Key Demographic Groups .....	63
Results by Service Response & Demographic Group .....	64
6 ☉ Applying the Data.....	82
Analyzing & Presenting CoR Output & Outcome Data .....	82
Recommendations for Collecting Useful Data .....	86
7 ☉ Conclusion .....	91
Project Evaluation .....	91
Recommendations for Revised Products.....	93
Recommendations for Successful Data Collection .....	97
Recommendations for Research & Development.....	104

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Bibliography ..... 106

### Appendices

- A. Volunteer Confirmation Survey
- B. Counting on Results (CoR) Advisory Committee
- C. CoR Participants by State and City
- D. CoR Participants by Service Response
- E. Contact Information for CoR Participants
- F. Key Informant Interview Summaries
- G. CoR User Outcome Surveys
- H. Final Recorded Library Output Data
- I. Final Observed Patron Activities Data
- J. Final User Outcome Data
- K. Success Stories by CoR Service Response
- L. Sample Presentation: What Can Numbers Tell Us?
- M. CoR Evaluation Survey

### Attachments

- 1. CoR Software (CD-ROM)
- 2. CoR Instruction Manual
- 3. Conference Presentation on CoR Project: New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries
- 4. Library Output Reports by Library, Service Response, and Location
- 5. User Outcome Reports by Library and User Demographic Group

### Index

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Acknowledgements

First and foremost, the authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 45 public libraries across the United States that participated in the Counting on Results (CoR) project. The goals of the CoR project—developing and testing new tools for outcome-based evaluation of public libraries—could not have been met without the active and enthusiastic support of the hundred or more individuals who became involved in the project on behalf of their libraries.

Thanks are also due to several members of the CoR project team for their contributions to the project and particularly this document. Several past and present members of the Library Research Service staff must be recognized.

Nicolle O. Steffen, Associate Director, Library Research Service, conducted a comprehensive and cogent analysis of user outcome data that she reports in chapter 5. She also coordinated the editing of the complete project report, including incorporation of numerous appendices and attachments without which the report would be incomplete.

Rochelle Logan, Associate Director of Support Services, Douglas Public Library District (and former LRS Associate Director), organized, coordinated, and—in large part—executed a series of key informant interviews of librarians representing participating libraries. These interviews provided most of the input needed to design collectible, relevant, and useful measures of library output and user outcome by Planning for Results (PfR) service response. She also authored and edited work of others for the first three chapters of this report—the Introduction, Review of the Literature, and Methodology—and reviewed the complete report.

Marcia J. Rodney, a library consultant (and former LRS Research Analyst), partnered with Logan on the key informant interview stage of the CoR project. The meticulous documentation of those interviews they generated together provided background information about each participating library (e.g., its community, facilities, staffing, collections, technology, programs, and services) as well as staff input identifying

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

desirable output and outcome statistics and delineating challenges that might arise in trying to collect such figures.

The CoR project was blessed with two extraordinarily able administrative assistants, Louise S. Conner, who retired recently from the State Library and the Library Research Service, performed yeoman service on this project. She managed the volunteer confirmation survey that established which libraries would become CoR sites. She also performed all of the data entry for over 5,000 user outcome surveys in postcard format, and processing that data and the over 500 returns from the Web versions of those surveys. Her successor, Stephanie Kean, undertook several substantial assignments during the final stages of the project, producing some appendices, re-formatting others, and assembling the final report with all of its appendices and attachments.

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While a University of Denver library school student, Suzanne Kaller conducted an extensive review of the literature on Planning for Results (PfR) service responses. This was her Capstone project, leading up to the completion of her master's degree studies. This well-documented review took as its point of departure and expanded upon preliminary work by Christie M. Koontz, one of the GeoMarketing International consultants.

Koontz and her GMI partner Dean K. Jue were project consultants. The output measurement portion of this project owes much to their earlier work for the U.S. Department of Education that demonstrated the value of utilizing technological tools to assist library staff in collecting more types of output data in more detail. In this project, as in their precursor project, they advocated linking demographic identifiers to patron activity and user outcome data. GMI was responsible for designing the CoR Palm-based software for collecting library output data, and for purchasing, loading, distributing, and supporting the Palm personal digital assistants (PDAs) on which that software resided. They also generated all tables of output results appended to this report.

# **Counting on Results**

## **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

The authors are also indebted to the project's advisory committee for their invaluable advice at several key crossroads for the project. This committee included Sandra Nelson, one of the creators of and the principal advocate and consultant for the Planning for Results (PFR) process. Because CoR built upon PFR, it was most helpful to have her involved in an advisory capacity in this project. Other members of the committee were: Denise Davis, National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; Jan Feye-Stukas, Minneapolis Public Library; Rochelle Logan, Douglas Public Library District; Mary Jo Lynch, American Library Association; and Al Zimmerman, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Their advice and input by e-mail, telephone, and in meetings during ALA Midwinter Meetings and Annual Conferences was appreciated greatly. Notwithstanding their excellent counsel, the conclusions and recommendations offered in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by them, either individually or as a committee.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Executive Summary

In recent years, public libraries have been urged to engage in outcome-based evaluation and decision-making. Organizations in both the private and public sectors have been hearing this call from funders for several years. When the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) was passed in 1996, the Institute for Museum and Library Services mandated outcome-based evaluation as part of its grant-making to public and other types of libraries from LSTA funds. To date, the focus of most activity responding to this call has focused on outcomes of special projects receiving short-term funding via state and federal grants. The Counting on Results (CoR) project shifted the focus from special projects to ongoing library services. The goals of the project were to develop and demonstrate the potential utility of new tools for outcome-based evaluation of public library services. (See Chapters 1 and 2.) These tools include the following:

- customizable software for Palm personal digital assistants (PDAs) that facilitates collecting standardized data on conventionally recorded library outputs (e.g., visits, circulation, reference questions) as well as observable patron activities in the library; and
- standardized questionnaires eliciting reports of the outcomes of public library service directly from patrons.

The project developed these tools and demonstrated their use by 45 public libraries representing 20 states and all four major regions of the United States (i.e., Northeast, South, Midwest, West). In addition to reporting data on conventional library service outputs, the project generated data on the observed library activities of more than 40,000 patrons and reports of the outcomes of library services from over 5,500 patrons. Thus, this project completed the largest, most comprehensive, and most detailed multi-state data collection of this type attempted to date. (See Chapter 3.)

This project built upon the Public Library Association's Planning for Results (PfR) model by designing data collection tools for six CoR service responses that were derived from nine of PfR's thirteen service responses: Basic Literacy, Business and

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Career Information, Library as a Place (Commons), General Information, Information Literacy, and Local History and Genealogy.

While the libraries involved in the project were volunteers and thus did not constitute a purely random sample, the cumulative results for all participating libraries indicate some interesting patterns in terms of both how and why individuals use their public libraries. (See Chapters 4 and 5.)

Data on observed patron activities in the library supports the widespread perception among library professionals that information technology is indeed a major factor.

- One out of five patrons (22.5%) was observed using a library computer. It was not possible to discern whether these individuals were simply using the library catalog to find a book or were searching a licensed database or the World Wide Web.
- An almost equal proportion (20.5%) was observed in the stacks and one out of six patrons (15.5%) was observed reading or writing. Together (36.0%), those figures indicate that more than a third of patrons observed were utilizing traditional library collections—overwhelmingly books, but perhaps books on tape or videos.
- These figures suggest that, if you divide patrons into two groups based on these data representing use of traditional library collections versus technology, the ratio is about three to two, respectively.
- Notably, in homework centers, the proportion of computer users rises to three out of four patrons (73.4%).
- Two strong tendencies of interest to youth services staff were observed. Two out of five preschoolers (41.0%) in the library were attending events, such as story times, and more than a third of young adults (35.0%) were using computers.

Outcomes of library service reported by general users were fairly predictable.

- Three out of four general users (74.0%) indicated that they read for pleasure.
- Over half (55.9%) learned about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- Almost half (46.2%) found information they needed for school, work, or a community group.

Reported outcomes for other service responses were, if not predictable, at least what advocates of libraries would wish.

- Of Basic Literacy patrons, two out of five (42.0%) became citizens, and more than a third (35.8%) read to a child or helped a child choose a book.
- More than a third of Business/Career patrons (35.5%) explored business opportunities or started or developed a business.
- Almost three out of five patrons who came to the Library as a Place (Commons) (59.4%) sought a quiet place to think, read, write, or study.
- Patrons of libraries focusing on Information Literacy were most likely to learn how to ask a librarian for help (34.3%) and to find what they were looking for with a librarian's assistance (51.1%).
- More than half of Local History & Genealogy patrons (52.7%) made progress researching their family histories.

The gender, age, and education level of patrons exerted strong, albeit predictable, influences on their reported outcomes.

- Women were more likely to report reading for pleasure (79.3%), while men tended to report starting or developing a business (44.7%) and searching the World Wide Web (55.3%).
- Outcome differences by age simply reflected the life cycle. Children were more likely to be seeking information needed for school work (67.7%), adults were more likely to seek business-related information (53.6%), and seniors were more likely to read for pleasure and attend cultural events (49.1%).
- Better educated patrons were more likely than less educated ones to read for pleasure (78.5%) and attend cultural events (36.8%). Less educated patrons were more likely to explore jobs, careers, and educational opportunities (33.3%), and to make progress on their family histories (58.6%).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

In addition to demonstrating the potential of Palm-based software and postcard and Web questionnaires as data collection tools, this project also identified several issues with which library decision-makers must grapple when collecting data. These data collection efforts may be simply local, as part of a peer group, or on a grander scale such as this project. (See Chapter 6.) These issues include the following:

- difficulties involved in creating truly comparable peer groups,
- the sufficiency of the number of libraries involved and the quantities of data generated by large-scale data collection efforts, and
- potential biases that can be introduced into data based on when or by whom it is collected.

The project identifies examples of these issues, offers strategies for dealing with them, and presents recommendations for revising the CoR products, ensuring success in future data collection efforts, and pursuing future research and development related to outcome-based evaluation. (See Chapter 7.)

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 1 Introduction

For the past three decades, American libraries have participated in various types of strategic planning. National library associations created a range of tools to help constituent libraries develop viable goals and objectives for their organizations. The latest planning process released by the Public Library Association (PLA) in March 1998 is *Planning for Results: A Library Transformation Process*. This was the first significant revision of the PLA planning process in ten years. It replaced *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries* released by PLA in 1987. The emphasis of the revised planning process changed from choosing library “roles” to preparing more focused “service responses” based on community needs. *Planning for Results* (PfR) emphasizes the connection between community needs and library services. It guides libraries in designing an overall program of service relevant to their particular locales.

The thirteen new service responses in the PfR manual took the place of eight roles in the older PLA process. By expanding the number of services to thirteen, PfR attempts to help libraries focus data collection efforts in appropriate directions. The thirteen service responses (SRs) are: basic literacy, business and career information, commons, community referral, consumer information, cultural awareness, current topics and titles, formal learning support, general information, government information, information literacy, lifelong learning, and local history and genealogy. (See Table 1.)

In addition to its emphasis on new SRs, the PLA process adopted the outcome-based evaluation approach advocated by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) as well as collecting long established output statistics. To determine “outcomes,” libraries must measure how library use impacts the lives of patrons. In other words, what difference did visiting the library make to an individual’s job performance, personal well-being, socializing, etc.? This type of information must be collected directly from patrons after they visit the library. Otherwise, how can patrons say whether their lives were impacted until they write that resume, read that book, or contact that agency recommended by the reference librarian?

The limitations of traditional output measures are acknowledged in PfR. Such figures as circulation transactions, program attendance and reference

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 1. Planning for Results Service Responses**

<p><b>BASIC LITERACY</b> Addresses the need to read and to perform other essential daily tasks.</p>	<p>social trends and their desire for satisfying recreational experiences.</p>
<p><b>BUSINESS AND CAREER INFORMATION</b> Addresses a need for information related to business, careers, work, entrepreneurship, personal finances, and obtaining employment.</p>	<p><b>FORMAL LEARNING SUPPORT</b> Helps students who are enrolled in a formal program of education or who are pursuing their education through a program of home-schooling to attain their educational goals.</p>
<p><b>COMMONS</b> Addresses the need of people to meet and interact with others in their community and to participate in public discourse about community issues.</p>	<p><b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b> Helps meet the need for information and answers to question on a broad array of topics related to work, school, and personal life.</p>
<p><b>COMMUNITY REFERRAL</b> Addresses the need for information related to services provided by community agencies and organizations.</p>	<p><b>GOVERNMENT INFORMATION</b> Helps satisfy the need for information about elected officials and governmental agencies that enable people to participate in the democratic process.</p>
<p><b>CONSUMER INFORMATION</b> Helps to satisfy the need for information that impacts the ability of community residents to make informed consumer decisions and to help them become more self-sufficient.</p>	<p><b>INFORMATION LITERACY</b> Helps address the need for skills related to finding, evaluating, and using information effectively.</p>
<p><b>CULTURAL AWARENESS</b> Helps satisfy the desire of community residents to gain an understanding of their own cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others.</p>	<p><b>LIFELONG LEARNING</b> Helps address the desire for self-directed personal growth and development opportunities.</p>
<p><b>CURRENT TOPICS AND TITLES</b> Helps to fulfill community residents' appetite for information about popular cultural and</p>	<p><b>LOCAL HISTORY AND GENEALOGY</b> Addresses the desire of community residents to know and better understand personal or community heritage.</p>

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

transactions are important, but they fail to capture the numerous ways in which unique individuals use public libraries. PfR attempts to remedy these limitations by asking libraries to collect output data by SR. For example, count how many people attended programs where they learned to build a family tree (Local History and Genealogy). This increased specificity presents a major practical challenge for local data collectors. Rather than collecting one number for all adult program attendance, they are asked to collect data in numerous service areas. In addition, the importance of collecting in-library use data is stressed in PfR. Such data could include, how many reference books were used this week or how many people surfed the Internet in the library's business and career area?

*Counting on Results: New Tools for Standardized Outcome-Based Evaluation in Public Libraries*, a Research and Demonstration project funded by a National Leadership Grant from IMLS, sought to develop collectible service-specific output and outcome measures—the types of data public libraries are expected to collect in the PfR process. Recognizing the difficulties librarians face in understanding and collecting outcome data, this project developed standardized questionnaires for collecting user outcomes. To ease the burden of collecting more detailed output statistics, this project sought to demonstrate the effective use of personal digital assistants (PDAs) in collecting data.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 2 Review of Literature

Literature concerning the measurement of performance in public libraries has generally focused on output measures that reflect usage of library services and resources. Typical output measures include circulation data, number of visits, number of reference questions asked or answered and fill rates (Van House, Lynch, McClure, Zwiezig, & Rodger, 1987). Although such data can demonstrate how much the library is used, it does not say enough about the effectiveness of the services provided.

On the other hand, the objective of *outcome*-based evaluation is to determine the impact of library services on people's lives. In other words, what was the ultimate impact of a visit to the library or a visit to the library Web site? Was it beneficial? How did it change or influence one's life? Perhaps it helped someone find a job, purchase a car, or start a new business.

Output measurements generally reflect usage of the library but do not necessarily address quality of services or social impact to the library user. However, use of both output and outcome measurement tools together can serve to provide a more comprehensive picture about the performance of a public library. As a performance tool, output statistics can demonstrate the "capacity utilization" of library services, which is only one dimension in the determination of the effectiveness of the library. On the other hand, outcome measurement can demonstrate how well a library is meeting the information needs of its users.

In order to evaluate public library services in terms of outcomes, library services are organized into categories known as service responses (SRs) as outlined in *Planning for Results* (Himmel & Wilson, 1998). A service response is an activity that the library performs in order to meet the needs of the community. The presumption is that one can observe or identify concrete benefits or results from the specific services that libraries perform.

Services within each category may differ considerably from one library to another. As some of the topics are broadly designed, service responses may overlap within some of these groupings. For example, lifelong learning can include information literacy, basic literacy, and career information.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

An exhaustive search for written material about measuring outcomes in public libraries produces only a few results. One of the earliest studies, "How Libraries Help" (Dervin, 1985) had the objective of finding how patrons benefited from service at libraries in California. Although this study was not limited to public libraries, comparisons were made among the types of libraries in the study (public, school and academic) and distinctions were made among them.

Dervin (1985) identified 16 benefits that she labeled "helps." Out of the 1,005 individuals surveyed, 81 percent or 814 people were able to refer to a recent library visit. Dervin commented that libraries typically measured their performance in terms of the movement of materials and use of services. Nevertheless, Dervin wanted to know what users did with library information and what was the "end result." She recognized that information was only a "means to an end" and "not an end in itself."

A "help" was identified in a more generic psycho-sociological manner than the more descriptive action-oriented focus of service responses. Some examples of Dervin's "helps" were:

- got ideas/understandings,
- found direction/got skills/ reached goals,
- made contact with others,
- got support/emotional control,
- felt connected,
- got rest/relaxation, and
- got happiness/pleasure.

In addition to her construct of "helps," Dervin identified reasons for visiting the library that seemed to match more closely with service responses. These reasons included school, job, home/hobbies, leisure, and relaxation. Then the reasons for visiting the library were compared with the 16 "helps." Dervin found that the people who visited public libraries were much more likely to experience "happiness/pleasure" than those people who had visited other types of libraries. Likewise, people who visited libraries for school projects were apt to say that they found "ideas/understanding" and less likely to say that they achieved "happiness" or "rest/relaxation."

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Usherwood and Linley (1999) studied the libraries of Newcastle on Tyne and the County of Somerset in England. They were interested in the social and economic impact of library services and how well libraries achieved their objectives. They gathered information by interviewing staff and public officials and conducting focus groups comprised of library patrons.

The results of their study supported the hypothesis that libraries play a significant role in everyday life. The study showed that libraries:

- support education, careers, job training, and literacy
- provide support to special groups such as seniors and ethnic minorities libraries are a cohesive community force
- foster community pride

McClure and Bertot (1998) studied Pennsylvania libraries to determine the impact of libraries on quality of life. As the other studies cited, the Pennsylvania study demonstrated the integral role of libraries in community life. It showed that libraries help people lead purposeful lives. However, unlike other studies, Bertot and McClure identified the degree to which libraries have formed partnerships with community groups and social service agencies. Numerous anecdotes were provided to demonstrate in a qualitative manner the role of libraries in everyday life.

The Clarion University study was a nationwide survey assessing the impact of libraries on daily lives (Vavrek, 2000). Fifty-one percent of the respondents indicated that libraries have a positive impact on quality of life while 41 percent said that libraries improve one's life. Ninety-eight percent of those persons who indicated that libraries improved their lives, when questioned in a follow-up interview, felt that libraries provided "educational enrichment," while 84 percent said libraries provided "entertainment" and 61 percent said libraries helped improved their reading skills.

## Basic Literacy

Proof of literacy 100 years ago was simply being able to sign one's name. Education was more of a moral value in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jones, 1995) and did not really become a duty or necessity until after World War I when literacy affected job performance. Today literacy is much more complex. The maxim of 'reading, writing and arithmetic,' is only a

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

start for elementary students born into a society that communicates with new languages, data bits, images and text in a variety of media (Megee, 1997). Libraries are faced with not only purchasing and offering the new media to the public, but also assessing its impact. While it was fairly easy to determine whether someone could read, write or add—it is more difficult to assess media literacy—how well someone accesses, analyzes, evaluates and then produces media (text, video, computer, etc.). Important research is emerging which does indicate users differ in approach and success. This directly affects how libraries respond.

According to Debra Wilcox Johnson (1997), public libraries have been involved with the needs of adult learners since the start of the twentieth century. Library literacy services consist of services to support literacy programs and instruction. Services to support literacy programs include literature about literacy, learning materials, and facilities to hold classes. Libraries provide literacy instruction for small groups as well as individual tutoring. Other services may also include the production of adult literacy materials such as student publications, videos, literacy software, and other teaching aides.

Strong (1998) commented that libraries nurture and support adult literacy students. The Queens Borough Library (NY), a public library system that serves a large ethnic population, offers a wide range of programs from small group discussion and individual tutoring to computer-assisted instruction. The importance of literacy skills to maintain a solid democratic society is emphasized in Strong's paper.

The literature is rich with stories of how literacy programs in libraries change lives. Di Alesandro (1998) documented the following success stories:

- A black man in his 50's had left school at an early age to work as a farm laborer. He joined the Literacy Connection for assistance in preparing for his GED. With the aid of a tutor, he was making excellent progress to learn how to read and write.
- An illiterate man from a small town in Arkansas had spent many years hiding the fact that he could not read. When his employer referred him to a library literacy program called the Literacy Connection, he only knew the alphabet and how to write his name. After four months, he was able to read a "Dr. Seuss" book and was not stopping at that.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- A married woman, over 70 years old was first beginning to learn to read. She remarked that she felt more independent and was capable of traveling outside this country.

## Business and Career Information

The availability of public-use computers is burgeoning in public libraries over the past decade. The public sometimes accesses these computers for preparing resumes, looking for employment, or career guidance counseling. This is affirmed by recent articles in library literature, as well as the fact that librarians in this study chose this response as a major role.

Many paper products are now online. This of course is 'old news.' The inherent problem of the replacement of print for online, is that it is difficult to identify what people are accessing and how much. A review of the literature shows an increase in library literature on the public's use of library computers, and a diminishing number of articles on job centers, career guidance and other longtime service components. This is rather a reflection of lack of ability to make real counts of what the public is accessing, rather than a diminished interest in utilizing the library's online services.

Job centers where mentioned are still successful and popular, utilizing a mixture of print and electronic resources (Eriksen, 1997). In areas that are more rural, the concept of a job-bus is utilized to take employment information out to people with diminished access (Martins, 1991). In assessing the library's role in career guidance, there was more discussion in the literature, but surprisingly with greater emphasis on student career days, career-weeks, career education in social studies classes, and career cooperatives (Winkel 1999; Nelson 1993; DeStricker 1998; Harris 1995; Martin 1993).

Some libraries conduct support groups for people engaged in the career/job searching process (Oserman & Durrance, 1994). Participants are able to brainstorm, exchange ideas, share problems, and provide each other with encouragement and moral support. Other libraries may offer counseling services for those patrons who prefer one-to-one interaction.

The literature supports the notion that public libraries play an important role in career/job searching and make significant contributions in that regard. The Kellogg-funded education

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

and career information centers are examples of programs in public libraries that impact job seekers in a positive way. The following stories demonstrate the impact that the Kellogg programs have had on a number of library patrons (Durrance, 1991):

- A 40-year old woman who had been a school bus driver was first introduced to the library while on a tour that was part of a "displaced homemaker program." She liked what she observed and so, she returned to the library for assistance in looking for a new career. Aided by the computer-assisted program called SIGI PLUS, in addition to assistance from the library staff and usage of the career reference materials, this former school bus driver, found a job as a clerk-typist.
- Raol, a young Hispanic man with an engineering degree had been experiencing difficulty finding a professional position. The staff at the public library assisted him in finding a job. He learned how to write his resume and develop a job search strategy. With the aid of the library, Raol, found a job working for a concern that had other Spanish-speaking employees.
- A 32-year old woman had lost her job in a factory. The library staff provided her with career information, counseling and moral support. Using the software called DISCOVER, she learned how to apply for financial aid for college and enrolled in college.

Public libraries offer a wide range of services to the business community in such areas as marketing, demographics, governmental regulations, taxation, trade, and the law. When contemplating a new business, users of the public library can attend workshops to learn the basic skills necessary to get started. Support groups offer the opportunity to establish contacts to identify key referrals, organizations and professional societies. Established organizations use the public library to conduct research in all fields.

However, there is not a great deal of literature documenting the impact of public libraries on business. Such was the comment by Vaughn, Tague-Sutcliff, and Tripp (1996) when they set out to study the impact of public libraries on small businesses. They found discussions about the library materials used as well as user satisfaction studies but concluded that impact studies were almost nil. Consequently, Vaughn et al. conducted a study in London, Ontario to identify the importance of libraries to small businesses. According to the results of their survey, 32 percent of the respondents indicated that they used the library

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

frequently. The kinds of information ranked the highest in terms of use were consumer markets, technology, and management skills (in that order).

In order to determine the importance of the public library to small businesses, Vaughn, et al., wanted to find out how business people would react if the library closed its doors. Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated that such action would have a significant impact. Some reacted in an emotional manner saying that the result would be "disastrous" or "devastating." Others indicated that it would mean they would have to pay for subscriptions and purchase costly books.

## Commons

Amid discussion of the impacts of networks and electronic resources, discussions of the importance of the library as a physical 'place' continue (Fast, 1998). The library's physical location in the community affects accessibility by certain groups. Some are inhibited from traveling far for library services by lack of habit, cultural perceptions and topographical factors (Koontz, 1997). Of course, library use includes a wide variety of things besides checking out books. The Library as a Place (Commons) service response involves types of library use that are not reflected in traditional statistics, such as: students needing a place to study, friends meeting at the library because it is convenient or free, pedestrians getting out of inclement weather, visits to exhibits, listening to speakers, patronizing the library shop or even eating lunch on the steps (Simon, 1992). Quick personal e-mail access is an increasingly popular service at libraries that provide it.

Library displays and in-library exhibits (on which there were 841 citations from 1984 to present!) remain popular for Library as a Place patrons and for librarians who enjoy developing them. The exhibits range from "why we celebrate Earth Day" (Stross, 2000) to "The Wizard of Oz" (Hopkins, 2000) to "Yeats" at the New York Public Library (AB Bookman's Weekly, 1999).

Community bulletin boards—once popular before the electronic age—seem to be less so, with people gaining quick community information from other myriad sources, particularly on the Web. A rural library, still vitally located in the town center, might be more successful with a traditional bulletin board. Some libraries have removed the boards due to complaints by diverse groups (Kristl, 1997).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Community Referral

Community referral (CI) is a "catch-all" expression that incorporates the kinds of things that help people manage their daily lives better through community involvement (Durrance & Pettigrew, 2000). It includes but is not limited to public agencies, and cultural and social organizations.

CI began as information and referral services (I&R) (Durrance & Pettigrew, 2000). In the 1970's, librarians began gathering and organizing information about governmental agencies, social agencies, and service providers in response to public needs that were unmet at the time. In the process, librarians learned how to store information in databases, publicize the information and form partnerships with community organizations.

In an electronic age, referral lists printed on paper continue to be popular at the Brooklyn Public Library. The Brooklyn Public Library maintains separate referral lists to aid small businesses, job placement, GED and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes, and services to immigrants (Eriksen & Maas, 1997). They create lists in response to the needs of their constituents and over time, the demand for these handouts has steadily increased.

However, libraries are also providing community information and communications electronically (Durrance and Schneider, 1996). Community networks serve as an electronic hub for general community information. Public libraries and community networks have a common mission: to provide information for all people to share. Both institutions incorporate community participation and spirit.

### Current Topics and Titles

One of the most popular reasons to visit a public library is to browse, select a book, or brush up on a current topic. More and more 'brushing up' on a current topic seems to be absorbed by Internet usage. Searching current topics and titles is evidenced under the 'General Information' service response from the review of an increasing number of articles on electronic reference and ready reference services.

Chelton (1993) wrote that after a bit of a hiatus, readers advisory programs are once again in vogue. Librarians are familiarizing themselves with standard genre headings in order to respond to the public's appetite for popular titles.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

According to the Clarion University survey, 42 percent of the respondents indicated that they used the library for enjoyment or hobbies (Vavrek, 2000). This statistic was consistent with the National Education Survey produced by the U.S. Department of Education that showed that 32 percent of white Americans used the public library for leisure activities. According to the Clarion University study, 46 percent of the respondents found that the public library was more useful than a bookstore for pleasure and hobbies.

Interestingly, libraries are mimicking the merchandising techniques employed by commercial book retailers, displaying materials to promote usage or circulation (Chelton, 1993). Although librarians display materials for the sake of circulation, patrons interpret such display choices as recommendations.

Librarians also offer discussion programs and book reviews to support the demand for current topics and titles. Readers depend upon librarians for reading recommendations (Belcastro, 1995).

## General Information

Reference service is one of the strongest service components provided by the public library for over a century (Garnsey, 2000). These services change often in response to new technologies. The provision of *General Information* frequently occurs through ready reference tools (those quickly and successfully accessed to answer user questions quickly), traditionally in print, and increasingly through electronic media, i.e., the Internet. In searching the literature, 'ready reference' yields 54 hits, while 'electronic reference' yields 261. The potential of the Internet to provide quick response to 'ready reference' questions is no longer a subject of debate. A review of the 'electronic reference' articles yields a growing number of articles regarding: 1) electronic e-mail reference; and 2) use of the Internet by librarians to answer user questions--ready reference and research questions.

E-mail reference services in public libraries are growing as the public becomes increasingly e-mail literate (Garnsey, 2000). Because of the relative newness of the service, there is little research in the public library field—most research resides in medical and academic libraries. A recent study, while not exhaustive, shed new light on important characteristics of the service, and its users, which could assist public libraries develop outputs and

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

outcomes for e-mail reference (Garnsey, 2000). The study accessed library Web pages to determine which libraries offered e-mail reference (329 public libraries.)

Findings included: 1) most librarians responded with answers within 24 to 48 hours; 2) most did not answer in-depth questions; 3) 82 percent answered questions from outside their service area; 4) most users used e-mail reference because it was convenient; 5) 92 percent of questions were answered by staff, and 94 percent were satisfactory to the user; 6) 54 percent were female; 7) most users were in education and information technology professions; 8) all would use e-mail reference again; 9) 55 percent of the libraries said the service was designed to provide ready reference yet the questions were one third ready reference, 25 percent research, and surprisingly, 18 percent genealogy researchers.

One major problem with the study was that library directors did not allow the researchers to directly contact the user, because of confidentiality issues, disallowing a more comprehensive research study. The experiences of other public libraries with e-mail reference services closely mirror the above study emphasizing user convenience and the library's core values of personal service and equal access (O'Neill, 1999; Tomaiuolo, 2000; Eichler and Haleprin, 2000).

Secondly, in reviewing how librarians are utilizing the Internet to answer reference questions, one study determined that by and large, reference librarians are still in conflict regarding the relative value of electronic databases versus print resources. In this study 46 percent refused to select print or electronic as the tool of choice, reiterating the choice is based upon the needs of the user. Most librarians (73%) agreed that the Web was useful in their daily work (Strover, 2000).

There is also discussion regarding guidelines and standards for electronic resources. While performance measures for staff are outside the scope of this review, user focus is not. It is suggested that user education for electronic resources should be provided according to level of need, formal and informal (Guidelines, 1998). Regarding possible user outcomes, it is suggested that these should be addressed by age and situation—e.g., students, parents, and educators (Kasowitz et al, 2000). These outcomes should primarily include easily reachable and accessible digital reference services.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

In summary, much of this literature suggests that while the Internet is judged to be an excellent way to search specific and, often, scientific databases for more sophisticated purposes, it is an excellent source of general information of the type usually handled in a typical reference collection of books. Thus, the Internet offers huge potential to smaller public libraries that may not be able to afford sizable collections of books (Gabriel, 1998).

## Information Literacy

Information literacy is by far the most reviewed concept among the service responses, in the literature, garnering 480 'hits.' Information literacy is best defined as being able to recognize when information is needed and be able to locate, evaluate and use the information effectively. The antecedent to the term is actually traced back to 1960 standards for school libraries, and the term is first used in 1974 (Loertscher and Woolls, 1997). The term increasingly covers a broad range of electronic-related activities and skills (Clausen, 1997; Greenwood and Frisbie, 1998). Much research is being conducted on how people search electronic resources. Specifically, what worked and did not work, and how and what user instruction and skills can ameliorate problems (Barnett, 1999; Diaz, 1997; Clausen, 1997).

Therefore, and not surprisingly, there is increasing discussion on user education programs. By far, academic and special libraries offer user education for electronic resources, and continue to increase their programs, while public libraries offer the fewest. For example, a recent study (Rader, 1999) identifies the following: publications dealing with user instruction in academic libraries increased 25 percent; school library publications increased 78 percent; special library publications, 400 percent; and public library publications, numbering (2), -60 percent. Yet public library users like all users need to learn how to best access, retrieve, and organize the burgeoning information available electronically. Especially vulnerable are those users who have no other access than the library (none at school or work). Academic and school libraries and related associations are producing reports and guidelines and standards on information literacy, since teaching is the heart of their mission (Byerly and Brodie, 1998; Breivik, 1999).

There are many information skills identified that qualify an individual to be information literate. Some of these include but are not exclusive to (Doyle, 1994):

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- recognizes that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making;
- recognizes the need for information;
- formulates questions based on information needs;
- identifies potential sources of information;
- develops successful search strategies;
- accesses sources of information including computer-based and other technologies;
- evaluates information;
- organizes information for practical application;
- integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge; and
- uses information in critical thinking and problem solving

It is generally agreed that information professionals are key to developing an information literate society, through guidance and training and skill development in schools, the public library, and in the workplace. The difficulty in developing the much needed standard statistics, outputs and outcomes, remains difficult, stymieing the nation's 10,000 public library systems in measuring and reporting how users use the electronic resources offered.

## Lifelong Learning

Public libraries have embraced the concept of lifelong learning since the days of industrialist millionaires such as Andrew Carnegie, who bequeathed millions to public library development, due to the role the library had in his career development. Today the public library is still driven to provide information to enhance the lifelong learning process. Librarians routinely do not ask users why they use the library or to justify why they use it. Amidst all public institutions, only the public library provides services without conditions (de la Pena McCook 1992.) Public libraries attempt to serve their users based upon an analysis of the community-served, information needs--and this commitment is for the lifespan of all citizens (de la Pena McCook). Services that a user could access over a lifespan include: getting preschoolers ready to read, affording opportunity for retirees to explore family history, helping the unemployed seek new job skills, offering new-readers high interest books, helping students with papers and science projects, etc. (de la Pena McCook).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Over time, literacy programs are embraced within this lifelong learning role, and therefore, embraced by funders, and the public, in general. Literacy and libraries is synonymous. As reviewed in earlier service responses (basic literacy and information literacy) one can see that as a public agency the public library can be the premiere agency to assure equal access to a burgeoning amount of media, if so directed by the profession. With information skills being touted as most important, some work is being done to develop a continuum of formal learning that libraries might indicate and guide which literacy areas are covered when--and by what type of library (i.e., family literacy in public libraries during preschool years, and reading and writing for school age in the school library during K-12.) (Doiron, 2000).

The role that the public library plays in lifelong learning is only as vital as the resources of the library, how the library communicates and offers these resources to the public, and the initiative of the user. This role will largely be defined by the lifelong learning needs of the community served.

Other activities identified in the literature include but are not exclusive to: job and career development services; preschool story hours (on and off site); summer reading programs for children; access to small business development plans (Drescher, 1994). These activities are only the tip of the iceberg, and could be multiplied by librarians in every community across America to best suit the lifelong learning services their library offers.

## Local History and Genealogy

Americans are increasingly engaged in efforts to trace their family history (Schneider & Stewart, 1988). The U.S. Bicentennial Celebration, Alex Haley's television drama, "Roots", and the publicity concerning the restoration of Ellis Island, contributed to this heightened interest. Schneider and Stewart believe that Americans are driven to discover their past from tracing family histories to preserving local records and histories.

Public libraries play a significant role in genealogy and local history endeavors. In some communities, the local public library may be the primary source of such historical information (McClure & Bertot, 1998).

Libraries provide guides to assist beginning researchers on how to conduct genealogical searches. Census data, birth and death records, city directories, as well as vast newspaper

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

collections are just some of the resources that public libraries have to offer. Unearthing one's family tree can lead to unanticipated consequences such as meeting with distant and not-so distant relatives. Similarly, participation in local history events at the public library may bring together long time residents searching their roots and newcomers wanting to know more about their community.

McClure and Bertot (1998) discussed how family members had been reunited with the help of information or records obtained at a public library. A patron was able to locate a son she had previously given up for adoption. She told the library staff that she had met her son and learned that he was happy with his adoptive parents. In another situation, a patron at the Osterhout Free Library was successful at locating a brother he had not seen in ten years by conducting a search on the Web.

Writing an article about his own experience at tracing his family history, librarian Anthony Tassin (1991), commented that people who pursue genealogy research are seldom let down by the outcome(s). He pointed out that he started his project at the local public library in Louisiana. Highlighting some features of public libraries, he remarked that some public libraries offer extensive genealogy services in terms of resources as well as expertise. His research resulted in the location of 440 persons that represented 620 positions on his family tree.

Special exhibits that portray local history as well as the cultural heritage of a community serve to bring people together and foster community pride (Rodriguez, 1991). Public libraries support research efforts ranging from school projects to exhibits for museums and local history societies (Thurman, 1987).

A story-telling program at the Oak Lawn Public Library brought together grandparents and young children (Dobrez, 1987). Grandparents told stories about their childhood, their family or other reminiscences. Although the intent of the program was to encourage story telling and reading books, it also preserved some oral history. The participants enjoyed this community gathering and the opportunity to meet new people. One child borrowed a book of stories about the culture and background of her ancestors.

Theodore D. Mason, Library Director, at the East Chicago Public Library, created the Centennial History project to portray life in East Chicago, its background, cultures, lifestyle,

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

and the contributions of its citizens to society (Rodriguez, 1991). As an old steel and industrial town, East Chicago was home of many immigrant groups. The project's exhibits generated pride in the community and interest among its citizens to contribute their memorabilia and photographs. Participation in the special exhibits brought together people who had since dispersed to communities that are more affluent. One memorable event involved the rededication of a mural that was created during the Work Progress Administration (WPA) era in the early 1930's. The reception included four models that had posed for this project when they were high school students 55 years earlier.

This literature review demonstrates that the services involved in the Planning for Results (PfR) service responses under study have been subjects of research and commentary for many years. It also indicates, however, that there has been very little actual research into the outcomes of those services from the patron's viewpoint. The closest previous research has come to taking that position is in user satisfaction studies. While it is immensely valuable to ask library patrons how satisfied they are with their library's services, that is not the same thing as asking them how those services affected their lives.

The previous literature on Planning for Results (PfR) service responses (SRs) was an immensely valuable resource for this project. One of the most challenging tasks in the Counting on Results (CoR) project was developing the lists of potential outcomes for each SR. The previous studies cited above as well as the key informant interviews of staff at participating libraries provided ample fodder for developing those lists.

This study is a substantial addition to the extant literature on public library evaluation, because it demonstrates, for the first time, that it is possible—albeit challenging—to select a particular type of public library service (i.e., a PfR service response), to observe patron activities in the library relevant to that service, and to elicit from patrons direct reports of the outcomes of that service. To date, most outcome-oriented evaluations of public libraries have dealt only with outcomes of discrete special projects, not ongoing services. Indeed, perhaps the greatest contribution of this study to the evaluation literature is its suggestion that output and outcome data could be utilized to re-envision public library services from the patron's—rather than the librarian's—perspective.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 3 Methodology

The main goal of the Counting on Results (CoR) project was the creation and demonstration of a workable model for standardized collection of library output and user outcome data that is adaptable for any size library in any part of the United States.

#### Recruiting

The CoR project team set out to recruit public libraries of various sizes representing every region of the country. Each member of the team solicited volunteers at speaking engagements at national conferences, including the Public Library Association (PLA), American Library Association (ALA), and Federal State Cooperative System (FSCS) for Public Library Data. In addition, state data coordinators in all 50 states were asked to put out a call for volunteers on their state's electronic discussion lists for librarians. The response from these efforts was overwhelming. The resulting list of volunteers included over 100 libraries from 26 states representing all major regions of the U.S. (i.e., Northeast, Midwest, South, and West).

Each volunteer library was asked to complete a questionnaire confirming their interest in the project, stating who the contact person was, identifying outlets or departments to be involved and their respective service responses (SRs), verifying that participating units met computer hardware and software requirements, and volunteering use of their own PDAs. More information was also sent to each volunteer library to clarify how much time they could expect to contribute to the project and what we were trying to accomplish. Forty-five libraries returned the questionnaire from 23 states. Each test site chose at least one SR for data collection. (See Appendix A.)

The libraries that volunteered for the project were very diverse, representing jurisdictions of various sizes and in different regions of the country. (See Tables 2 and 3.) It is also noteworthy that the volunteers include public libraries in 20 of the 50 states. Thus, each region was represented by three to seven states, precluding the possibility of a single state being taken as representative of an entire region. A review of the full participant list further indicates that they include libraries in a variety of settings: central cities, suburbs, outlying cities and towns, and rural areas.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 2. CoR Participating Libraries Relative to All U.S. Public Libraries by Population of Legal Service Area**

<u>Population of legal service area</u>	<u>Universe of U.S. public libraries, 1998</u>	<u>CoR participating jurisdictions, 2001</u>
1,000,000 or more	20	3
500,000-999,999	54	4
250,000-499,999	94	5
100,000-249,999	323	5
50,000-99,999	513	9
25,000-49,999	860	9
10,000-24,999	1,716	7
Less than 10,000	5,384	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,964</b>	<b>45</b>

**Table 3. CoR Participating States by Region**

<u>Region</u>	<u>Number of states</u>	<u>States (number of sites)</u>
Northeast	3	NJ (1), NY (3), PA (8)
South	6	AL (1), FL (3), GA (1), LA (1), NC (1), TX (6)
Midwest	4	IA (2), OH (1), ND (1), WI (3)
West	7	AZ (1), CA (2), CO (4), MT (2), NY (1), OR (2), WA (1)
U.S.	20	(45)

A literature review was conducted, focusing on all 13 service responses. The resulting document contributed to the development of lists of possible outcomes and output measures. Also, as a consequence of this research, the team began to examine the idea of combining some of the service responses.

## Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee was invited to assist the CoR team on everything from review of the outcome and output measures, recommendations during the recruitment phase, to comments on the instruction manual. (See Appendix B.) Members of the Advisory Committee included:

- Denise Davis, Director, Statistics and Surveys, National Commission on Libraries and Information Science;
- Jan Feye-Stukas, Associate Director, Minneapolis Public Library;
- Rochelle Logan, Associate Director of Support Services, Douglas Public Library District (Colorado);

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- Mary Jo Lynch, Director, Office for Research and Statistics, American Library Association;
- Sandra Nelson, a consultant, speaker, trainer, and writer specializing in public library planning and management issues and especially the Planning for Results process; and
- Alan Zimmerman, Consultant, Public Library System Administration and Finance, Public Library Development, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

CoR advisors met with the project team at ALA Midwinter Meetings and Annual Conferences in 2000 and 2001, and provided comments, feedback, and other invaluable support via telephone and e-mail.

## Key Informant Interviews

The CoR team understood the necessity and value of conducting key informant interviews with staff of all 45 volunteer libraries. (See Appendices C, D, and E.) Interviews were conducted by telephone in July and August 2000. Items of business during each interview included:

- identifying the goals of the project,
- gathering local background information about the library,
- discussing the list of possible outcomes and outputs sent to the library in advance.

Each interview lasted from 20 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of outlets or departments participating, the number of SRs involved, and how many staff participated in the interview. The CoR team took observations from volunteers into consideration in designing the beta test questionnaires and software for the PDAs. Based on these interviews, the CoR team developed a better understanding of the volunteers, their levels of expertise with PFR and PDAs as well as their local goals for the project. (See Appendix F.)

It was clear that many volunteers were interested in the project because of the use of PDAs to collect data. During interviews, a lot of enthusiasm was expressed about the new technology and the need to collect observed activities in the library as well as the usual recorded output measures.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Instrumentation Design

At the conclusion of the interviews, the team decided to change some data collection methods for the outcome surveys. One simple yet effective idea from a volunteer was to use large postcards for the outcome surveys. (See Appendix G.) That way library staff could hand a patron the card as they left the library to be sent in the mail with the postage paid. Also, we decided to make the survey available online, despite the concern expressed by many interviewees that their traffic on public Internet computers was too heavy to accommodate this strategy. Also developing an online survey and making it available meant hiring an outside contractor, making it an additional cost not included in the original research grant budget. The team decided that enough libraries asked for an online version that it was important to make one available. Both the online survey and the postcard version gave the patron a chance to go home and realize the impact (outcome) of their visit to the library and then respond to the survey. In fact, however, several volunteer libraries utilized survey return boxes. These responses were returned in bulk.

The decision to make the survey small enough for a large postcard greatly influenced how much information could be collected. Not only was demographic information important to collect, making each question clear to the general public in so small a space was a challenge. For instance, asking a business and career question like “As a result of my visit to the library, I developed job related skills,” is less clear than including the parenthetical “(resume writing, interviewing, computer or sales skills).”

Beta testers helped the CoR team realize the value of combining some of the SRs. Data elements suggested for Current Topics and Titles, Lifelong Learning and General Information were indistinguishable. Therefore, we combined those three and labeled it General Information. Of the thirteen SRs, volunteer libraries selected only eight. Three SRs were combined into one (General Information subsuming Current Topics and Titles and Lifelong Learning) and two SRs were combined into one (Commons subsuming Community Referral), leaving four PFR service responses intact in this study: Basic Literacy, Business and Career Information, Information Literacy, and Local History and Genealogy. Interestingly, many key informants speculated that Lifelong Learning—which this project subsumes under General Information—itself subsumes Formal Education Support in the minds of most patrons (a belief supported by user outcome survey results). (See Table 4.)

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 4. Derivation of Counting on Results (CoR) Service Responses from Planning for Results (PfR) Service Responses**

CoR	PfR
Basic Literacy	Basic Literacy
Business & Career Information	Business & Career Information
Commons (Library as a Place)	Commons
General Information	Community Referral
	Current Topics & Titles
	General Information
	Lifelong Learning
Information Literacy	Information Literacy
Local History & Genealogy	Local History & Genealogy
	<i>Other PfR service responses:</i>
	- Consumer Information
	- Cultural Awareness
	- Formal Learning Support
	- Government Information

Information collected from the interviews also helped in the design of the Palm software. (See Attachment 1.) The CoR team understood what data items to select for each SR and was better able to develop standard definitions and data collection procedures after talking to test site librarians. At the point of selecting and defining observed measures, other issues such as patron privacy were addressed. During the study, library staff were instructed to walk around their library with the Palm, writing down the number of people using the computers. Patron privacy was stressed by only counting the number of people using the computer, not what licensed database they were using, or whether they were on the Internet. We were not asking them to look over the patron’s shoulder to look at the computer monitor.

Another detail that arose in designing observed measures was the use of the term “browsing.” When a patron is observed in the stacks, they can be either looking for an item by call number or just checking the shelf, therefore browsing. The team decided to call the observation “in the stacks” rather than browsing, so it covered all reasons for patrons being in the stacks.

While many test site libraries voiced the need to collect recorded measures on the Palm, problems eventually arose in designing software to accommodate both observed and recorded output measures. The team assumed that all libraries regularly collect traditional output measures that could be easily entered in the Palm. For each service response,

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

recorded measures were to be collected on number of programs and attendance at those programs, number of visits to the Web page and more. The difficulty came in entering data for different time periods. The library may count the number of people at a program on a weekly or monthly basis and only have data for the Web site on a monthly basis. The Palm software was designed so the person entering the data could choose between daily, weekly, or monthly numbers.

When choosing the software for the Palm, the CoR team searched for a product that was reasonably priced, easy to use by our volunteers, downloadable to a PC to send to the CoR team, and had no restrictions on the license for distribution. After researching many different products, the team decided to purchase Pendragon Forms software for the Palms.

Once draft surveys were written and software was loaded onto PDAs, the beta test phase began in December 2000. Beta testers received one Palm loaded with software and a draft of the instruction manual to help load software on their computers. Other volunteers tested the outcome surveys.

Problems were ironed out after the beta test phase, particularly with loading software onto computers. This was required in order to upload data from the PDA to the computer to then be sent to the research team via e-mail. Computers with varying operating systems and serial ports required some customization before the data collection phase could begin. Each test library was asked to check their serial port and inform the team if they could use the standard 9-pin serial port or would require a special purchase of a USB port. Those libraries with Windows 95 and NT also needed special instructions for loading the software. A number of librarians asked their system administrators to help with the software loading. In some cases this was a blessing, in others, it became clear that system administrators were not reading the instruction manual. The CoR team received more calls from people with Windows 95 and NT than any other operating system users.

## Data Collection

In February 2001, all volunteer libraries received 200 postcard outcome surveys per SR, one Palm IIIxe, and an instruction manual. (See Attachment 2.) The data collection period, originally scheduled from January to June 2001, was rescheduled from February to July 2001. Participants were instructed to choose ten sample days representing their regular

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

hours when they would use the Palm to collect data. We asked them to walk around the library once in the morning, afternoon and evening to collect observed measures. In addition, they were to enter their recorded measures collected from other sources into the Palm (e.g., circulation statistics from an automated system, Web statistics from Web Trends report). At the end of each sample day, volunteers were asked to transfer data on the Palm to a local personal computer and to send those files to the CoR team via e-mail. In some locations, establishing or maintaining this routine was problematic.

Data entry forms on the Palm PDAs included one form for observed activities and one form for each SR. As previously mentioned, the library was expected to collect recorded output measures at daily, weekly or monthly intervals. This enabled participants to merge their current data collection process with that of this project. For instance, in the General Information SR, the recorded activities form included entering the number of: people who visited the library, reference questions, circulation transactions, ILL transactions, and more.

The observed activities form on the Palm was the same for all libraries. On ten sample days, participants were asked to walk around their library utilizing the Palm to collect observed data. Participants selected the area of the library being observed and the age group of the observed user. They counted how many people were observed at various locations, including the service desk, in the stacks, attending library events, interacting with others, working on computers, and viewing audio-visual materials and exhibits.

During the six-month data collection period, February to July 2001, each library was asked to return 100 outcome surveys per service response. Test sites received sample press releases, signage examples, and suggestions for administering the outcome surveys at their libraries. Because the surveys were specific to SRs, librarians had to decide how to target patrons who received a particular service. For instance, libraries collecting data on basic literacy outcomes could offer surveys to mothers of children attending story time programs or adult learners whose tutoring sessions occur at the library. In another case, a reference librarian answering a telephone question about company information could ask the patron to fill out the online survey targeting the business and career SR. The survey was also available in Adobe Acrobat format for libraries or patrons to download from the Library Research Service Web site (<http://www.lrs.org>).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

During the data collection period, a number of libraries preferred to collect the outcome surveys themselves, then bundle and return them to the CoR team in a box rather than have patrons fill them out and mail them individually. By bundling their surveys, some volunteers felt they had a better understanding of how many surveys were completed of the 100 they were requested to collect for the study. By bundling their surveys, these libraries ultimately saved the CoR project money on postage.

Five volunteer libraries chose to withdraw from the study after the data collection period began. Reasons for their withdrawal ranged from not having enough time to, more often than not, changes in personnel. These libraries returned the Palm PDAs and outcome surveys.

In May 2001, two members of the CoR team were preparing to speak at a LITA pre-conference on the use of handheld computers in libraries. At that time, the data collection period was more than halfway completed. One of the researchers called a sample of the CoR volunteers to ask how the Palm output data collection was proceeding. Contacts for some libraries reported not using the Palm for observed measures. Staff at these libraries preferred to walk around with a clipboard and paper, writing down their observations, and then entering the data on the Palm. Reasons cited for taking this option were:

- the ability to be (or, at least, feel) less intrusive on user privacy,
- the wish to total the day's observations before entering them on the Palm,
- the small size of the Palm screen,
- difficulties using the stylus, and
- staff perceptions that, when using the Palm, they were conspicuous distractions to users.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 4 Measuring Library Output

Since publication of *Output Measures for Public Libraries*, second edition, in the late 1980's, the term "output measures" has been utilized to refer in summary fashion to traditional library usage statistics, such as patron registration, library visits, circulation, reference questions, and interlibrary loans, usually in per capita form. In the Counting on Results (CoR) project, this term was expanded to include modified versions of traditionally recorded library output measures, such as those just listed, as well as data on user activities collected by unobtrusive staff observers. A major goal of this project was to develop processes for collecting these types of data that are as efficient and easy as possible.

Efficiency and ease of use were considered essential, taking into account the limited number of staff available to collect data in most libraries and expecting that other responsibilities constrain the amount of time they can give to the task. Underlying assumptions of the output measurement part of the CoR project were that most public library personnel are already fully utilized and that any extra project requires extra time and extended commitments. For these reasons, new processes for collecting and reporting output measures had to be designed for optimum utility.

#### Key Design Elements

Accordingly, strategies for collecting library output data were designed to incorporate two key elements: Palm technology and lenient data collection requirements.

#### Palm Technology

First, Palm technology was selected for its popularity, portability, data management capabilities, and flexibility.

- During the three-year period encompassing the proposal to fund this project and the project itself, the Palm PDA has gone from being a rare toy of early adopters of new technology to an essential tool of "road warriors" and other technologically savvy workers. The ubiquity of the PDA recommended it as the hardware platform that might permit widespread adoption of any software solutions developed by the CoR project.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- The hardware choice of the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) enabled library staff to enter data directly while walking around the facility and observing user activities as unobtrusively as possible.
- The project software, which was developed to run on the Palm Operating System using Pendragon Forms, enabled project participants to enter data quickly and easily, to share their data locally, and to transmit their data to a central remote location.

## Lenient Data Collection Requirements

Second, requirements for data collection using this technology were very lenient. Each project site was asked to observe and record data on user activities for a minimum of 10 sample days during a six-month period, February to July 2001. Because of the number of libraries involved, no effort to pre-select a single set of sample days was made. Individual library participants were free to select their own 10 sample days—or, indeed, any number of sample days in excess of that number (which many, in fact, did). This flexibility was deemed to be necessary owing to the many reasons why an individual pre-selected date might be inappropriate for a given library. (For example, a library might be closed on a particular date; it might be under-staffed for some exceptional reason, like in-service training; or its user traffic might be exceptionally high or low due to an unusual event, like hosting a special program or receiving a visiting dignitary.)

These two defining features of the output measurement part of the project were intended to provide the best possible snapshot of library usage within the six service responses adapted from the Public Library Association's Planning for Results process.

## Data Quality Caveats

Before output data for participating libraries is summarized and analyzed, two general caveats regarding the quantity and quality of this test data set should be acknowledged:

- The amount of data collected by individual participating libraries varied dramatically. Some libraries collected fewer than the requested number of samples, while others collected much more frequently. To illustrate, the number of observed library activities sample ranged from a low of one for a few libraries to as many as 20 for other libraries. For recorded output data, sample periods

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

ranged from a low of one day to a high of six months. As a result, libraries that sampled more frequently account for disproportionate percentages of the aggregated results for all libraries. This circumstance, which weakens the value of the data for comparative purposes, would be one to avoid in the actual application of this data collection approach.

- As is always the case with data collected for sample periods, the representativeness for an entire year of 10-day samples is questionable. Sample days must be chosen with the greatest of care to avoid days that are either exceptionally slow or busy. Using randomly selected dates, particularly when multiple libraries are involved, is the only way to guard against this problem. Even then, if a randomly selected sample date happened to be one on which library managers knew a major promotional event, was scheduled, it would be advisable to substitute another date, perhaps the day before or after the event.

In addition, there is one caveat that applies to recorded output measures: the inconsistency of data collection practices across multiple statistics for a single participating library. For instance, data for some of library output statistics was collected via the library's automated system (e.g., circulation), while data for other measures was collected manually (e.g., brochures distributed). As a result, the same library could submit circulation data for several months, but only report the number of brochures distributed for two days. Although it is possible to normalize such data, confidence in the normalized values would be questionable. In retrospect, the solution to this problem is obvious: more standardization of data collection periods. Although, for demonstration purposes, output data are normalized to one week whenever possible, the actual use of these normalized values to compare different libraries is not recommended. They are simply presented here to illustrate how such data might be useful if collected more rigorously.

Despite these caveats, which are typical concerns to face in a pilot project, sample data on library outputs and user activities collected by participating libraries will be summarized and analyzed to illustrate the potential meaning and utility of such data.

## Recorded Library Output Results

On the basis of an extensive review of the literature and key informant interviews, several new library output measures were developed, tested, and approved by prospective participants. While it may have been a novelty to suggest that libraries collect some of

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

these “new” data elements comparably with other libraries, most of the activities they measure are reasonably common and often tracked locally. The new output statistics include issuance of new library cards, in-library use of materials, off-site document delivery, attendance for library tours and off-site programs, and Web usage. Despite strong affirmations of the value of these activities and the wisdom of collecting data on them, surprisingly little data was reported for the “expanded” group of output measures for most service responses (SRs). Unfortunately, this deficiency, added to the small number of libraries that reported such data for several SRs, weakens severely the utility of the data. (See Appendix H.)

Fortunately, the one noteworthy exception to those circumstances is the group of libraries that chose the General Information SR. It will be illustrative to examine recorded output statistics for this SR, because it was so broadly defined (incorporating Current Topics & Titles and Lifelong Learning—and, arguably, Formal Education Support) and because it was relatively popular, being chosen by a couple of dozen libraries representing all four major regions of the country (i.e., Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). It is also notable that most of the statistics requested for this SR were actually collected and reported.

Generally, the most valid and reliable manner in which to analyze a given library’s statistics is to examine trends over time for that library. Barring changes in key staff, facilities, and service priorities, there are usually no issues regarding the accuracy or consistency of the sort that easily arise when comparing one library to another. That said, library-to-library comparisons and analyses of individual library statistics relative to group norms can yield meaningful results, if taken with a few grains of salt.

Consider, as an example, the Sioux City (Iowa) Public Library, which reported almost all of the recorded output measures for the General Information (GI) service response (SR). (See Table 5.) Variations in the size of the user populations for individual libraries may explain some of the differences observed between Sioux City and the statistical norms for GI libraries; but, they do not suffice to explain many differences. For instance:

- Sioux City’s reported number of weekly library visits is above average at 138 percent. That library similarly outstrips the group averages for directional questions (136 percent), total in-library use of periodicals (130 percent), and Web hits (134 percent).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 5. General Information Outputs: Sioux City and All GI Libraries, 2001**

<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Sioux City, IA</b>	<b>As % of GI average</b>	<b>Average for GI libraries</b>
Library visits	8,888	138%	6,461
Directional questions	1,029	136%	758
Reference questions	900	89%	1,008
--via the Web	18	3%	658
Total circulation	7,532	75%	9,988
Fiction circulation	3,635	168%	2,155
In-library use total	3,047	171%	1,780
--reference materials	620	106%	584
--periodicals	1,104	130%	848
--circulating materials	1,321	259%	510
Items borrowed	25	50%	49
Items loaned	103	239%	43
Items delivered	658	501%	131
Non-fiction delivered	126	242%	52
On-site programs	7	42%	17
--attendance	126	56%	225
Off-site programs	7	37%	19
--attendance	119	26%	463
Web hits	6,370	134%	4,766
CD-ROM uses	35	74%	47

- On other statistics, Sioux City rates well above average compared to all GI libraries. The library excels at off-site delivery of documents generally (501 percent of the GI average) and fiction materials in particular (242 percent). It also reports total in-library use of materials (171 percent) and hold requests (169 percent) somewhat higher than population alone could explain away.
- On still other statistics, Sioux City falls dramatically below average compared to all GI libraries. Library staff make little use of the World Wide Web when responding to reference questions (only three percent of the GI average). Numbers of programs and program attendance—both on- and off-site—are also meager relative to all GI libraries (42 and 56 percent, on-site; 37 and 26 percent, off-site, respectively).

What might these statistical variations tell local decision-makers?

- Almost certainly, the statistics on library visits, directional questions, in-library use of periodicals, and Web usage are simple artifacts of the fact that Sioux City Public Library serves a larger population than other GI libraries.
- While the Sioux City library's reference traffic appears to be typical, its staff appear to be ignoring the World Wide Web as a resource for answering reference

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

questions. Is this a consequence of limited staff access to Web-worthy computers, or might these data point to a staff training need?

- The Sioux City library's outreach to groups via off-site programming is relatively slight, but its outreach to individuals via document delivery services is exceptionally strong. This service emphasis may be a deliberate one; but, if it is not, it may be an issue for decision-makers to consider. Are outreach services focused on individuals meeting local needs sufficiently, or might library managers consider increasing outreach to groups to match the library's commitment to extending its collections and services off-site to individuals?

The interpretation of these statistics is subject to several caveats. Data compared across libraries were normalized to a one-week period. Actual reports may have been for one or two days or more than two weeks. Also, the non-existence of an outlet level equivalent to population of legal service area deprives an analysis such as this of a simple correction for size differences among libraries.

## Overall Observed Activities Results

Using Palm PDAs and Counting on Results (CoR) software, staff at participating libraries were asked to observe and classify the activities of library patrons at three intervals (morning, afternoon, and—if appropriate—evening) on at least 10 sample days. Together, these observations provide a snapshot of what library patrons do while visiting their library. The summary results, overall and by service response (SR), indicate some interesting patterns. (See Table 6 and Appendix I.)

It may be a sign of the times that the proportions of patrons observed using computers and in the stacks—about one in five each—are almost equal (22.5% and 20.5%, respectively). Rival activities for second place overall are attending events and reading or writing at about one out of six (16.4% and 15.5%, respectively). About one in 10 patrons (11.3%) were observed at service desks, ceding third place to that activity. The remaining three specific activities monitored logged only single-digit percentages of patrons. In descending order of frequency, they are: interacting with others (6.3%), viewing or listening to audio-visual materials (1.7%), and viewing displays (1.7%).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 6. Observed Activities of Library Patrons by Service Response, 2001**

Observed Activity	Percent of Patrons Observed by Service Response						
	Basic Literacy (N=1,413)	Library as Place (Commons) (N=7,061)	Business/ Career (N=9,182)	Local History/ Genealogy (N=7,719)	General Information (N=23,891)	Information Literacy (N=10,167)	Total (N=59,433)
At service desk	5.7	14.4	9.4	7.5	13.6	9.1	11.3
Attending event	7.6	13.0	16.5	40.8	8.0	21.0	16.4
In stacks	30.6	22.7	28.1	11.7	20.5	17.5	20.5
Interacting with others	8.9	7.3	5.2	7.0	6.4	5.7	6.3
Reading/writing	12.5	16.0	15.2	9.6	17.8	14.9	15.5
Using computer	22.8	18.1	20.0	14.7	26.8	23.8	22.5
Viewing display	1.8	2.7	0.7	2.5	1.7	1.2	1.7
Viewing/listening to A/V	9.8	0.6	2.2	2.8	1.2	1.4	1.7
Other activity	0.4	5.3	2.7	3.5	4.1	5.4	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

These results are reasonably consistent with several popular conceptions about the purposes and strategies of library users.

- Members of the general public visit libraries primarily either to obtain books for leisure reading or to obtain information on a particular topic from books, magazines, or online resources. More and more, public libraries are being acknowledged by the citizenry as key agencies helping to bridge the “digital divide” by providing public access to the Internet.
- Often, patrons spend extended amounts of time at the library, either utilizing it as a quiet place to read and write or attending a library event that helps them to improve their own information-seeking skills (e.g., a class on how to search online databases more effectively) or sheds light on a topic of interest (e.g., an author lecture or a reading/discussion group).
- While many patrons are able to help themselves, often they require the assistance of reference or other public service staff to locate what they seek. Sometimes, people go to the public library because they know it is the place where they can obtain such expert help.
- Apart from conferring with library staff or participating in public events, most people think of the library as a quiet place to be with their own thoughts rather than a public space in which to interact with others. Groups of schoolchildren or

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

hobbyists studying together are neither unheard of nor unwelcome in libraries, but libraries are not their principal gathering places for such group activities.

- While videotapes and audio books are increasingly popular items in library collections, most patrons check out these items for use elsewhere, rather than using library equipment to view or listen to them.
- Finally, while individuals occasionally linger over library displays and exhibits and thus learn about new materials, programs or services, this activity is an incidental pleasure not a prime motivation for a library visit.

For libraries serving particular service responses (SRs), there are some striking departures from this general pattern that are worth mentioning.

- Basic Literacy patrons are only about half as likely as other patrons to be observed at service desks (5.7% and 11.3%, respectively). It is not surprising to think that young children or adult new readers might be timid about approaching a service desk. If that is the case, serving such patrons calls for more pro-active service by staff. Instead of waiting behind a service desk, staff members serving a Basic Literacy clientele might be more useful if they left the desk and sought out patrons who appear to be having difficulties. Indeed, the fact that this type of service is already being provided may explain this low BL statistic. It may also be that BL patrons are difficult to identify to be counted. While children are easy enough to spot in most libraries, adult new readers may be much more difficult to identify. The fact that libraries cannot confine BL activities to a single area also makes it challenging to collect data for this SR. While the children's room or area is distinct, adult new readers may only be conspicuous if they are observed in an area of the stacks specifically for books and other materials intended for that population.
- Local History and Genealogy patrons were more than twice as likely as other patrons to be observed attending events in the library (40.8% and 16.4%, respectively). Genealogy in particular is an area of research in which many libraries specialize and on account of which they draw many repeat visitors. The suggestion by this statistic that patrons are so dramatically more likely to be observed attending programs on genealogy-related topics is a credible one. On the other hand, this statistic may also betray the fact that some data collectors for this SR may have tended to conduct their observations while such events were in progress. Intentionally or unintentionally, their timing may have been

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

based on their self-perceptions of availability for the task. If patrons are together attending an event, they are probably making fewer demands on individual staff members who might otherwise be busy helping them at service desks, in the stacks, or at computers.

- Conversely, General Information (GI) patrons were only half as likely to be observed attending events (8.0% and 16.4%, respectively). This statistic possesses a high level of intuitive validity. When someone visits the library in pursuit of leisure or topical reading, to obtain a specific fact or document, or to solicit help with homework, they are usually on a solitary mission that would not involve program attendance. The only noteworthy exception might be someone who visits the library specifically to participate in a reading/discussion group as a follow-up to reading a popular new book.

## Individual Results

Examining observed patron data overall revealed some interesting patterns. Additional light may be shed on this type of data by parsing it by service response (SR). Doing this successfully, however, depends on several factors, such as the number of libraries studying an SR, the extent to which such libraries are truly “peers,” the number of observations reported by each library, and the schedule on which those observations were made. Data collected as part of this project illustrate these issues well.

### Basic Literacy

No attempt is made to analyze Basic Literacy (BL) activities by individual library. Only three libraries completed data collection for this SR. Further, for all BL libraries, there were fewer than 1,500 (1,413) observed patrons, and for two of those three, there were fewer than 500 observed patrons (Birmingham, AL, 435; Columbia County, 336).

### Business & Career Information

Only four libraries collected and reported data for the Business and Career Information (BCI) service response (SR), but combined they observed the activities of more than 9,000 patrons (9,182). The responses for two of those libraries and the total figures for the small BCI group illustrate a very important hazard of data analysis: attempting to use statistical norms for a too small and too diverse group as benchmarks for assessment.

## Counting on Results

### New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Of the four BCI libraries, those for Dickinson, ND, and Monessen, PA, represent extremes in at least one noteworthy respect. (See Table 7.) Apparently the Dickinson library still operates on a fairly traditional model. Almost half of its patrons (48.2%) were observed in the stacks, but only one in seven (15.0%) were observed using computers. Conversely, statistics for the Monessen library suggest a somewhat less print-oriented, more technologically savvy group of patrons. The Dickinson figures are practically reversed. Only one in ten Monessen patrons (10.8%) was observed in the stacks, but more than two out of five (41.3%) were observed using computers. These two statistics for this pair of libraries probably reflect real differences between them. Those differences may be explained by any of a variety of factors (e.g., the size of the library's print collection, the number of library computers, the distribution of patrons by age and educational attainment), but they are probably meaningful ones.

That said, consider the total percentages for all four BCI libraries. Clearly, the extreme values reported by Dickinson and Monessen influenced the middling percentages (28.1% for in the stacks, 20.0% for using computers) for all BCI libraries. The fact is that those total percentages are not very characteristic of any one library. They are the result of the amalgamation of data for a small number of very different libraries. Thus, in such a situation, library managers would be well-advised to focus their attention on the statistics of their own libraries and, perhaps, comparative statistics for selected other individual libraries; but, if a hoped-for peer group turns out to be too small or too diverse, summary statistics for that group will make poor benchmarks.

**Table 7. Observed Patron Activities for Selected Business/Career Libraries, 2001**

Percent of Patrons Observed by Library			
Observed Activity	Dickinson, ND (n=3,892)	Monessen, PA (n=1,310)	Total (n=9,182)
At service desk	12.8	10.9	9.4
Attending event	1.1	3.1	16.5
In stacks	48.2	10.8	28.1
Interacting with others	5.1	11.8	5.2
Reading/writing	15.7	11.1	15.2
Using computer	15.0	41.3	20.0
Viewing display	0.0	1.4	0.7
Viewing/listening to A/V	1.9	9.6	2.2
Other activities	0.3	0.0	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Library as a Place (Commons)

Six libraries collected and reported data on observed activities of over 7,000 patrons (7,061) for the Library as a Place (Commons) service response (SR). While analyses were not conducted for most SRs with such small numbers of libraries and patron observations, this one will be utilized to provide several exaggerated examples of the hazards of summarizing and comparing data for small groups of libraries.

What do the dramatic variations in percentages for most Commons activities say about meaningful differences among these libraries? Do they reflect circumstances that demand the attention of library managers and decision-makers, or do they merely indicate the inevitable limitations of dealing with data for small groups of libraries and, in some cases, small numbers of observations?

**Table 8. Observed Patron Activities for Selected Commons Libraries, 2001**

Percent of Patrons Observed by Library				
Observed Activity	Albany, NY (N=393)	Erie, PA (N=1,127)	Big Lake, TX (N=1,350)	Total (N=7,061)
At service desk	0.0	3.8	27.3	14.4
Attending event	0.0	63.2	5.0	13.0
In stacks	36.6	0.0	34.1	22.7
Interacting with others	19.9	3.8	1.2	7.3
Reading/writing	18.1	20.1	18.5	16.0
Using computer	21.6	0.0	10.0	18.1
Viewing display	2.8	5.2	3.2	2.7
Viewing/listening to A/V	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
Other activities	0.0	3.9	0.8	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Across Commons libraries, 14.4 percent of patrons were observed at service desks, but individual library figures for this activity ranged from zero for Albany, NY, to 27.3 percent for Big Lake, TX. (See Table 8.) Does the zero for Albany mean that service desks are inadequately staffed, or that staff are busy away from those desks, seeking out patrons who appear to need assistance? The latter might explain why Albany reported 19.9 percent of patrons interacting with others, more than double the group average (7.3%). Or do Albany's zeroes for "at service desk" and "attending event" imply that, while someone recorded these observations, a lone service desk went unstaffed and there was nobody available to host a library event?

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Similarly, 13 percent of all Commons patrons were observed attending events, but individual library reports ranged from zero for Albany, NY, to 63.2 percent for Erie, PA. Apparently, observations of patron activities in Erie were made during exceptionally popular programs—so popular that they literally emptied the stacks and drew most people away from service desks and computers. Notably, other activities for Erie were not nearly so far off the group averages.

These two extreme examples demonstrate quite graphically the dilemmas faced when a small group of libraries attempts to collect comparable data. The smaller the group, the more statistics are influenced by local circumstances, such as staffing levels and programming schedules. Albany's two zeroes may illustrate the Hawthorne effect—a pollution of its data on patron activities by the act of studying those activities.

## General Information

The 20 public libraries for which the General Information (GI) service response (SR) was studied comprised the largest single group for any service response. Because this SR was the most broadly defined, those libraries generated the largest numbers of patron observations. The total number of patrons observed by all GI libraries reached almost 24,000 (23,891, to be precise). Indeed, six GI libraries observed more than 1,500 patrons each. It is no coincidence that, generally, this number of libraries and this number of observations resulted in the most modest variations among libraries—with a few noteworthy exceptions.

The results for this SR call special attention to one observed activity—attending an event—that proved to be problematic. (See Table 9.) While event attendance was identified by most key informants as an important activity to be observed, it is a different type of activity than the others. All of the other activities occur on an ongoing basis. Library events—such as story times, author lectures, and reading/discussion groups—are scheduled to occur at specific times and for finite periods. The qualitatively different nature of this activity made it inevitable that the frequency of its observation from library to library would run a great range, leading to dramatic discrepancies between some individual library values and the group average. For example, while event attendance for all GI libraries was eight percent, local reports ranged from less than one percent (0.6%) of Mesa Public Library's patrons to more than one-fifth (21.4%) of Altoona Public Library's patrons.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 9. Observed Patron Activities for Selected General Information Libraries, 2001**

Observed Activity	Percent of Patrons Observed by Library						
	Mesa, AZ (N=2,177)	Sunnyvale, CA (N=1,544)	Multnomah Central (N=3,103)	Altoona, PA (N=1,593)	Kitsap, WA (N=1,787)	Hurst, TX (N=2,588)	Total (N=23,891)
At service desk	7.7	29.7	11.8	15.9	9.7	24.8	13.6
Attending event	0.6	5.1	0.9	21.4	0.7	14.3	8.0
In stacks	24.6	16.5	21.3	20.6	15.3	18.9	20.4
Interacting with others	3.9	5.1	3.1	8.6	5.0	6.3	6.4
Reading/writing	26.8	10.2	18.2	14.6	20.6	17.2	17.8
Using computer	31.8	33.4	30.9	12.4	43.9	15.4	26.8
Viewing display	1.0	0.0	0.4	1.6	1.5	2.1	1.7
Viewing/listening to A/V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.1	0.3	1.2
Other activities	3.6	0.0	13.4	4.2	3.3	0.8	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The only other local-to-local or local-to-group discrepancies rivaling these concern patrons observed using library computers. Across all GI libraries, more than one-quarter (26.8%) of patrons were observed using computers, but some participating libraries reported only about half that (12.4% for Altoona, PA; 15.4% for Hurst, TX) and one library exceeded the group percentage by over 60 percent (43.9% for Kitsap, WA, v. 26.8% overall). While the range for the local extremes on computer use exceeds the local range for attending events, both of the former extremes are closer to their group value (12.4% for Altoona, PA; 26.8% for all GI libraries; 43.9% for Kitsap, WA). It seems likelier that the differences from library to library for using computers are a result of real differences between libraries than mere statistical anomalies. Perhaps the smaller percentages for Altoona, PA, and Hurst, TX, and the larger percentage for Kitsap, WA are explained by levels of education and income in those communities or the relative availability of public access computers in those libraries.

Apart from these anomalies, the limited variation displayed by GI libraries for the other observed activities testifies to the importance of collecting such data for a reasonably large number of patrons (in this case, more than 1,500) and as part of a reasonably large group of libraries sharing a similar focus (in this case, 20 libraries focusing on the General Information SR).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Information Literacy

No attempt was made to analyze Information Literacy (IL) activities by individual library. While seven libraries collected and reported data for this service response (SR), only three of them reported 1,000 observations or more. The remaining libraries reported fewer than 1,000 observations each (ranging from 817 for Moreau to as few as 233 for Nazareth, PA).

### Local History & Genealogy

Eight libraries collected and reported data for the Local History and Genealogy (LHG) service response (SR), but the total number of patrons observed was less than 8,000 (7,719). As a result, LHG libraries generated results similar to those for Commons libraries. LHG libraries also demonstrated additional issues that must be confronted when collecting data on patron activities via unobtrusive observation.

Similar to Albany, NY, La Fayette, GA, reported a near zero (0.8%) for patrons observed at a service desk and an actual zero for those attending events. (See Table 10.) Conversely, on event attendance, Boulder, CO, reported a stratospheric 78.5 percent. This is just another example of the sort of extremes that were discussed for Business and Career Information and Commons libraries.

What is different in this case is the domination of this group's patron observations by a single library, Round Rock, TX. That library alone accounts for almost half of total group observations. Clearly, such data would be more informative if participating libraries were more equally represented in the results. It is worth noticing that sometimes disparate figures reported by Birmingham, Boulder, and La Fayette have very little impact on the total group percentages. Because the samples for these libraries are so small, they may or may not represent well typical patterns of patron activity in those libraries. Certainly, taken on their own, Round Rock's statistics will be of far greater value than those of the other participating libraries. With such a large sample of observations, the likelihood of Round Rock's statistics reflecting reality is much greater.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 10. Observed Patron Activities for Selected Local History & Genealogy Libraries by Service Response, 2001**

Observed Activity	Percent of Patrons Observed by Library				
	Birmingham, AL (N=435)	Boulder, CO (N=1,803)	Lafayette, GA (N=121)	Round Rock, TX (N=3,649)	Total (N=7,719)
At service desk	15.6	2.9	0.8	9.0	7.5
Attending event	24.6	78.5	0.0	43.6	40.8
In stacks	9.7	1.5	12.4	14.0	11.7
Interacting with others	20.9	2.1	24.0	5.5	7.0
Reading/writing	13.6	3.3	36.4	8.7	9.6
Using computer	15.6	1.3	9.9	14.8	14.7
Viewing display	0.0	1.4	1.7	1.8	2.5
Viewing/listening to A/V	0.0	0.4	4.1	0.0	2.8
Other activity	0.0	8.7	10.7	2.6	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Observed Activities by Location

Because some participants in Counting on Results (CoR) wished to study more than one service response (SR) at a time, the first data item collected for each patron observation was its location. Data collectors could choose from 14 locations—areas or rooms found in most libraries (or, at least, most libraries providing certain services).

## Overall Patterns

Though the intended utility of the location field was for libraries studying more than one SR, an examination of patron activities by library location discloses some interesting patterns. Some of these patterns confirm assumptions, but others question what we think we know about user behavior: (See Table 9.)

### A-V Area

Patrons who use audio-video materials are observed most frequently in the stacks (61.7%), followed distantly by using computers. (See Table 11.) Notably, only eight percent of these users were observed viewing or listening to a-v materials in the library. Most a-v users visit the library to borrow these materials for use elsewhere. At any given time, as many as one in five (18.8%) are observed using computers. That suggests that they are likely using the library's online catalog to locate a-v materials of interest. In the outcome measurement phase of this project, many respondents indicated that they rely on audio books when commuting and videotapes to entertain and educate their children.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 11. Observed Patron Activities by Library Location**

Location (Area or Room)	Percent of Patrons by Activity										Total
	At service desk	Attending event	In stacks	Interacting with others	Reading or writing	Using computer	Viewing display	Viewing/listening to AV	Viewing display	Other activities	
Audio-Video	4.7	0.0	61.7	1.9	1.0	18.8	3.5	8.0	3.5	0.5	100.0
Basic Literacy	13.3	18.4	18.4	24.4	11.5	11.9	1.6	0.0	1.6	0.6	100.0
Business/Career	2.3	46.7	0.0	1.9	15.8	14.1	0.2	12.4	0.2	6.6	100.0
Children's	4.5	14.1	37.3	13.5	11.5	15.6	0.6	0.4	0.6	2.4	100.0
Commons	17.6	32.5	1.3	7.4	7.6	24.0	2.3	0.3	2.3	7.0	100.0
Community Info.	7.9	1.9	6.4	8.8	43.5	2.0	19.1	0.0	19.1	10.5	100.0
Current Topics	1.4	0.0	72.1	2.5	4.2	9.2	10.1	0.0	10.1	0.4	100.0
General Library	21.7	14.5	10.7	4.7	15.7	26.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	4.2	100.0
Homework Center	1.2	2.6	1.1	7.1	13.2	73.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	100.0
History/Genealogy	5.9	13.7	14.9	9.3	22.6	3.2	4.7	23.0	4.7	2.7	100.0
Periodicals Room	0.6	0.0	7.8	7.0	75.3	3.8	0.9	0.3	0.9	4.3	100.0
Reading Room	33.4	4.2	2.6	3.2	41.2	15.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.4	100.0
Reference	12.0	0.5	8.9	3.0	15.3	58.5	0.1	0.4	0.1	1.2	100.0
Stacks	0.5	0.0	85.7	2.8	7.7	1.4	0.9	0.0	0.9	0.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Basic Literacy Area

Basic Literacy patrons are most often observed interacting with others (24.4%). A key activity for this service response (SR) is one-to-one tutoring; this is predictable. What may be more surprising is that interacting with others is most likely to happen in the context of this SR. The children's area—where story times occur and children read or play together—placed second (13.5%), and Local History and Genealogy—where adult programming is often popular—a distant third (9.3%).

### Business/Career Area

Somewhat curiously, patrons in Business/Career areas were most frequently observed attending events (46.7%). That may be an unexpectedly strong showing for that activity, due to when programs were scheduled and when observations were made. But, it may indicate that libraries focusing on BCI service are more likely to schedule programs and other events of interest to this clientele.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Children's Area

Those observed in children's areas were most likely found in the stacks (37.3%). That statistic probably reflects the fact that most children are brought to the library to select leisure reading or school-related materials to be checked out for home use.

### Commons Area

Of course, patrons in Commons areas (e.g., the lobby, meeting rooms, galleries) were often spotted while attending events. Visiting a public library to attend an event is practically a definition of the Commons (or Library as a Place) role.

### Community Information Area

In Community Information areas, reading or writing (43.5%) and viewing displays (19.1%) were the most frequently observed patron activities. Both findings make intuitive sense. Such patrons are likely to need to consult on-site records maintained by and housed at the library and not available for check-out. Patrons in these areas are also likeliest to find relevant information in a library display or exhibit.

### Current Topics Area

Patrons observed in Current Topics areas (e.g., shelves of new books or the latest periodicals) are most often observed in the stacks (72.1%), and, sometimes, viewing displays (19.1%). When a library has a special area set aside to showcase new additions to its collection, it would be expected that those interested in current topics would be attracted to it. Similarly, library displays might further highlight such acquisitions.

### Homework Centers

A sign of the times—though still a dramatically surprising one—is that three out of four patrons in homework centers (73.4%) are observed using computers. Much is being written of the so-called “digital generation” that this statistic confirms emphatically. It is surprising that only one in eight homework center users (13.2%) is observed reading or writing. With the exception of patrons observed in book stacks and periodical areas, it is also surprising that those observed in homework centers are the least likely to be observed at service desks (1.2%).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Local History/Genealogy Area

Patrons in Local History/Genealogy areas are involved in a variety of activities, but none more than utilizing a-v materials (23.0%). In these areas, that almost certainly reflects the use of records available only in microform (e.g., Census reports; vital statistics; newspaper accounts of births, marriages, and deaths).

### Reading Room

Reading rooms are the most likely place to observe patrons reading or writing (41.2%) and at service desks (33.4%). These statistics confirm the value of the library collection and the important role of the librarian as a reader's advisor.

### Reference Area

Computer users (58.5%) dominate Reference areas. With the increasing expansion of access to authoritative licensed databases via public libraries, patrons are turning more and more to these resources for complete, timely, and accurate data on myriad topics. While the usage patterns revealed by examining patron activities by location are occasionally intriguing, for the most part, they are not especially surprising. More pointedly, even when the results are unexpected, they do not suggest immediately taking any particular course of action—though they might.

## Observed Activities Results by Age Group

An examination of the overall results for observed activities by age group reveals some interesting differences among those groups. The only activity for which there are not notable differences among age groups is going to a service desk. For all participating libraries, 12 percent of patrons of all ages were observed at service desks. For specific age groups, that figure ran a very narrow range from 11 percent each for pre-schoolers and seniors to 14 percent for children from kindergarten to eighth grade. Every age group is exceptional for at least one activity. (See Table 12.)

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 12. Observed Patron Activities for Selected General Information Libraries, 2001**

Percent of Patrons Observed by Age Group						
Observed Activity	Pre-schoolers (n=3,817)	Kindergarten- 8 <sup>th</sup> grade (n=6,372)	Young adults (n=4,464)	Adults (n=22,875)	Seniors (n=4,580)	Total (n=42,108)
At service desk	11	14	13	12	11	12
Attending event	41	14	1	13	16	15
In stacks	19	28	18	21	22	22
Interacting with others	9	8	9	5	5	6
Reading/writing	6	13	16	17	22	16
Using computer	7	18	35	24	13	22
Viewing display	1	1	1	2	3	2
Viewing/listening to A/V	1	1	2	1	4	2
Other activities	4	3	5	3	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### Attending Events

While one in seven patrons (15%) was observed attending events, more than two out of five pre-schoolers (41%) and only one in a hundred (1%) young adults were included in that group. As story times are the most widely and frequently offered type of library program, the high participation rate in library events by pre-schoolers is little surprise. It is, however, somewhat disappointing to report that library programs would appear to be anathema to “tweens” (pre-teens) and teens.

### In Stacks

Overall and for most age groups, approximately one-fifth of patrons were observed in the stacks. The exception is youngsters from kindergarten through eighth grade. More than one-quarter (28%) of them were observed in the stacks. This statistics suggests that when elementary and middle school children are at the library, their priority is selecting books and other materials to check out and read or use elsewhere.

### Interacting with Others

Younger patrons, from preschoolers to young adults, were twice as likely to be observed interacting with others (8-9%) as adults and seniors (5%). While overall observations of

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

social interaction at the library are relatively rare (6%), it is predictable that younger patrons would be less timid about engaging in activities that violate the peace and quiet most adults, especially seniors, associate with the public library.

### Reading/Writing

Generally, one-sixth of patrons (16%) were observed reading or writing. The exception was pre-schoolers; only one in 17 (6%) of them was observed in this activity. Very young children are often brought to the library specifically to attend a story time or similar event and to select books and other materials to check out. Compared with other age groups, they are more likely to do their reading at home, perhaps especially when a parent, older sibling, grandparent, or other caregiver is available to read with them. The quintessential example, of course, is the bedtime story.

### Using Computer

Percentages of patrons observed using computers follow a predictable curvilinear pattern by age group. Only seven percent of pre-schoolers were observed using computers. This activity peaks at more than a third (35%) of young adults, then declines to one in eight (13%) seniors. The infrequency with which pre-schoolers were observed at library computers may be a consequence of library policies regarding patron access to the Internet. That more than one-third of young adults were found at computers by staff observers is no surprise. Teenagers and their younger siblings were born into the digital age, unlike their parents and grandparents, whose age groups are still evidently less inclined by degrees (24% and 13%, respectively) to use them.

### Viewing Display

While only one patron in 50 (2%) was observed viewing a library display or exhibit, it is no great revelation that adults are twice as likely as younger people to slow down long enough to view an exhibit (2% v. 1%). Seniors are three times as likely as youngsters to give any attention to library exhibits (3% v. 1%). Almost certainly, that is because they have the time to give; it may also be that they tend to delve into subjects in greater depth and, thus, may value the additional detail to which an exhibit might lead them.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Viewing/Listening to A-V

One of the few genuine surprises in the results by age group concerns viewing or listening to audio-visual materials at the library. Though this activity has the same low overall incidence as display-viewing (2%), seniors (4%) are twice as likely as others to spend time at the library utilizing a-v materials. Perhaps seniors are less likely to own the equipment necessary to use the materials at home (e.g., VCRs, CD-ROM and audio cassette players). Or, it may be that they simply have more time and the inclination to use a-v materials at the library.

The summary and selected individual library results reported above provide examples of the variety of statistical patterns likely to be yielded by any analysis of a library's service outputs or its users' activities. Through numerous examples, these findings were utilized to demonstrate the value of asking several important questions when examining data, particularly comparative data for individual libraries and groups of libraries. Some of the questions that should be asked regard statistical technicalities:

- Is the quantity of data under study sufficient? Are there enough libraries in the comparison group and enough reports or observations per library for the data to be considered fairly representative? If the number of libraries is very small, dramatic differences between individual libraries may "wash out" into middling group trends.
- Are the statistics being examined biased by when data are being collected or by whom data are collected? Attending an event proved to be a highly problematic observed activity. Why? Because events happen at discrete times and for finite periods. All the other activities observed tend to occur on an ongoing basis (e.g., being at service desks, in the stacks, or at library computers; reading or writing). The evidence for several libraries suggests that, when an event is occurring, a substantial minority—if not the majority—of patrons tend to be attending it. If they are doing that, the numbers of patrons available to be observed in other activities is suppressed artificially. If one library collects data while events are happening and another does not, the results are difficult to compare. For that reason, event attendance probably should not be part of the observed activities data collection. In other cases, one had to wonder if patrons were not being observed at service desks or attending events because, in a given small library or

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

department, the only staff member on duty was collecting data! A certain degree of premeditation in data collection efforts is required to avoid the Hawthorne Effect (the dilemma of an object of study being altered by the act of studying it).

- How much of an observed difference is attributable to differences in the size of the populations being served? Since publication of *Output Measures for Public Libraries*, library managers have usually focused on per capita statistics. When outlet level data such as these are under study, how does one make a similar adjustment, in the absence of outlet level population data? One option illustrated above is calculating per visit statistics. If the outlet at which a patron registered as a borrower is known, per borrower statistics might be another option.

Answers to technical questions about the validity, reliability, and comparability of statistics can often lead to observed differences being disregarded as either meaningless or of unknown meaning. Answers to more substantive questions about statistical reports may help to identify issues that require attention:

- What questions are raised by observed differences between libraries or between one library and a group of carefully chosen peers? Might the differences found suggest a need for library managers to review the library's staffing patterns, collection development or access policy, program topics or schedules, on- or off-site services, facilities siting, or equipment needs? Perhaps so; perhaps not.
- Observed statistical differences might just as easily be interpreted as acceptable consequences of a particular library's community demographics, patron needs, or the library's chosen mission.
- It is also important to question the exact meaning of statistical observations. For several libraries, few or no patrons were observed at service desks. That fact might be interpreted in several ways. As mentioned above, it may simply be a consequence of the service desk being abandoned while someone was collecting the statistics in question. More substantively, however, there are two radically different possibilities: are service desks abandoned because the library either under-staffs them or does not train staff to be approachable? Or, are service desks unoccupied because public service staff are being pro-active—roaming the library in search of patrons who appear to need help and offering it?

# **Counting on Results**

## **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

When analyzing library data, it is important to remember to value the questions the numbers raise as well as the ones they answer. Meaningful statistics that answer pressing questions come at a price. Library management must make it a priority to collect high-quality statistics. Local managers who use data and local line staff who collect it must review and update the library's data collection activities regularly. Library managers and decision-makers must also examine and utilize their library's data frequently and thoughtfully. If all of these commitments are being met, it is more likely that library statistics will answer questions rather than raise them.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 5 Measuring User Outcomes

The outcome results are analyzed in three ways. First, total percentages and overall results are reported for all respondents from all libraries (i.e., regardless of the library’s response rate). Second, for libraries with 50 or more responses per service response (SR), notable results for individual libraries are presented. Lastly, differences in outcome results for key demographic groups are discussed. (See Appendix J.) Each of these analyses is illustrated by success stories reported by patrons. (See Appendix K.)

#### Overall Results

While the greatest value of outcome data is at the local level, some interesting patterns emerge when these data are examined together for all participating libraries. These relationships may illustrate larger patterns that might be discernible if one studied individual library results alone.

#### Basic Literacy

Notably, several seemingly related outcomes in the Basic Literacy SR had widely varying response percentages. (See Table 13.) For example, “became a citizen” at 42.0 percent was the most popular outcome, yet “prepared for the naturalization exam” was only indicated by 6.8 percent of respondents. In

*“My children love to read and I could not have accomplished this without my public library. Our read alouds, history books and readers all come from the library. Now my 8 year old’s dream is to become a librarian someday – she has such a love for books!”*

*Grand Prairie PL  
Hazel Crest, IL*

addition, “read to a child or helped a child choose a book to read” was the second most frequent outcome, being chosen by over a third of respondents (35.8%). However, only one in ten respondents indicated that they “helped a child do homework or improve grades” (10.5%). The likeliest explanations for the reported frequency of these related outcomes are their relative specificity and the likelihood of the library being the site of the activity.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 13. Basic Literacy Outcomes: All Respondents, 2001**

Outcomes	As a Percentage of Total Respondents
1) Improved reading/writing/math	9.9
2) Prepared for GED	6.2
3) Passed the GED	4.9
4) Prepared for the naturalization exam	6.8
5) Became a citizen	42.0
6) Read to a child or helped a child choose a book	35.8
7) Helped a child do homework or improve grades	10.5
8) Applied for a job	13.6
9) Got a job/better job/raise in pay	8.6
10) Managing personal finances better	27.2
11) Info about bus, car, education, jobs, money, etc	25.3
12) Participated in a community activity	27.2
13) Wrote a letter/postcard/e-mail	28.4

Approximately one in four respondents chose each of four diverse outcomes:

- “wrote a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone” (28.4%),
- “managing personal finances better” (27.2%),
- “participated in a community activity” (27.2%), and
- “learned something I needed to know about using bus, buying car, education, health care, jobs, handling money, insurance, or child care” (25.3%).

The most basic of literacy outcomes, “improved my reading, writing, or math skills,” was chosen by only 9.9 percent of Basic Literacy respondents. Possible explanations of this infrequent response include the relatively high level of educational attainment of most library users, the availability of such services from other community organizations, and the possibility that, in the rush to develop users’ skills with new electronic media, libraries may be losing sight of the value of promoting basic literacy skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—among their users.

*“Coming to [the] library has helped me meet many new people and to find playmates for my children. As a new immigrant to the U.S., I’ve been able to feel more comfortable because of the help of the library staff.”*  
*Grand Prairie PL  
Hazel Crest, IL*

The outcomes related to GED testing were the least often indicated.

- Approximately one in fifteen chose, “prepared for GED test” (6.2%).
- Less than one in twenty indicated they had “passed the GED test” (4.9%) as a result of visiting the library.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

These low figures may reflect the fact that a high percentage of library users are traditional students or high school graduates and that the vast majority of GED preparation centers are neither in libraries nor work closely with them.

### Business and Career Information

Curiously, none of the outcomes offered for the Business and Career Information (BCI) service response (SR) was selected by much more than a third of the respondents for this SR. (See Table 14.) The most general BCI outcome, “explored new business options, started or developed a business” was selected by only 35.5 percent of respondents. This outcome included topics such as market research, financing, home business, self-employment, regulatory information, and zoning.

Other relatively popular outcomes were:

- “developed job-related skills [résumé-writing, interviewing, computer, or sales skills] (30.6%),
- “explored jobs or careers, or determined necessary education or training” (27.7%), and
- “made better investment or retirement decisions” (26.0%).

*“I was able to meet with representatives from SBA and SCORE. I was given access to several SCORE people in my field via e-mail and given a wealth of information by the reference librarian. From this information we were able to expand our customer base.”*

*Mesa PL  
Mesa, AZ*

Of the remaining BCI outcomes, none were selected by one respondent in five. Perhaps reflecting the prosperity of the economy in recent years, the lowest percentage for any outcome in this study is “closed a business [sale, merger, bankruptcy]” (2.5%).

**Table 14. Business and Career Information Outcomes: All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
1) Explored/started/developed a business	35.5
2) Dealt with a personnel issue	13.6
3) Closed a business	2.5
4) Explored job/career or determined necessary education/training	27.7
5) Developed job-related skills	30.6
6) Learned how to advance in job/career	14.9
7) Made career changes or relocated	5.8
8) Made better investment or retirement decisions	26.0

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Library as a Place (Commons)

According to the respondents for this SR, libraries continue to be used in very traditional ways—to find library materials and to have a quiet place to enjoy them. (See Table 15.)

- Two-thirds (66.6%) of respondents indicated that they “learned about new books, videos, music, etc.” as an outcome after visiting the library.
- Three in five (59.4%) said they “had a quiet comfortable place to think, read, write, or study.”

These are two of the highest outcome percentages in the entire study, second only to “read for pleasure” in the General Information SR (74.0%).

**Table 15. Library as a Place (Commons) Outcomes: All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
1) Met a friend/co-worker	29.9
2) Made a new friend	20.2
3) Learned about new books, videos, or music	66.6
4) Completed or made progress on school work	26.1
5) Learned about or was referred to another community organization	15.4
6) Quiet place to think, read, write, or study	59.4
7) Took a break at library café or coffee shop	13.4
8) Enjoyed a lecture, concert, film, or other public event	26.3
9) Attended or participated in a public meeting	17.0
10) Visited library-sponsored chat room on the Web	4.8

Within the Library as a Place SR, there is a cluster of outcomes, each of which received a response of about 25 percent. These outcomes include:

- “met a friend/co-worker” (29.9%),
- “enjoyed a lecture, concert, film or other public event” (26.3%),
- “completed or made progress on school work” (26.1%), and
- “made a new friend” (20.2%).

The results indicate that at least one in four respondents use the library as a place for socializing or to do school work.

While networked access to electronic resources is having a tremendous impact, libraries continue to be important as gathering places. Traditional circulation

*“I have very much enjoyed the multitude of CD’s – a great variety. I use the word processor constantly and check my e-mail weekly. Going to the library is a great family activity. We go as a family at least once a week – often more.”*

*NW Reno PL  
Reno, NV*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

statistics are neither designed nor intended to measure this type of use. Ways in which patrons utilize libraries as public spaces include: students needing a place to study, friends meeting at the library for convenience, and pedestrians getting out of inclement weather. This study's results for the Library as a Place SR confirm that library facilities play many important roles, only one of which is providing a place for Internet access (see Information Literacy).

The least popular SR was "visited a library-sponsored chat room on the Web" (4.8%), which may say more about the prevalence of library-sponsored chat rooms than their popularity with patrons. The issue is further complicated by the controversy of libraries providing public access to chat rooms, especially to children and to adults who may be predators. Thus, library policies regarding the suitability of utilizing library computers to engage in virtual chat may have served to depress this response.

### General Information

General Information (GI) had the greatest number of volunteer libraries participating (25), as well as the largest number of individual respondents (3,353). In addition, GI outcomes were the most popular, including the highest percentage of respondents for a single outcome. Indeed, the least popular GI outcome was more frequently reported than the least popular outcomes for other SRs. These trends indicate that not only does this SR apply to the greatest number of libraries, it is also the most relevant to the largest number of library patrons. (See Table 16.)

It should come as no surprise to library professionals, or for that matter to library users, that leisure reading is the most widely cited outcome in this study. By more than 7 percentage points, "read for pleasure" (74.0%) was the outcome chosen by the greatest percentage of respondents in any SR. In addition, because General Information had the most participants, "read for pleasure" also had by far the largest number of respondents indicating it (2,482). This finding may challenge the belief of many working in the public library sector that libraries are in the information business rather than the book business. However, the numbers indicate that a large proportion of library users continue to use the library primarily, if not exclusively, as a source of leisure reading.

*"I read for the pure pleasure of it."*

*Senior reader  
St. Martin Parish PL  
St. Martinville, LA*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 16. General Information Outcomes: All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
1) Read for pleasure	74.0
2) Obtained a specific fact or document	41.8
3) Learned more about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest	55.9
4) Identified or contacted an organization	15.6
5) Found information for school, work, or a community group	46.2
6) Shared a cultural experience or exchanged info w/ others	19.4
7) Learned more about a legal, social, or political issue	23.8
8) Met new people with whom I share common interests	22.0

For the Counting on Results project, the General Information service response (SR) explicitly absorbed two others, Current Topics and Titles and Lifelong Learning. In addition, key informant interviews further indicated that, in the minds of many library managers, Lifelong Learning subsumed, in whole or in part, Community Referral, Consumer Information, and Formal Learning Support. This amalgamation of conceptually distinct but practicably indistinguishable SRs is reflected in some of the other popular GI outcomes:

- Over half of GI respondents (55.9%) “learned more about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest.” This outcome—one at the core of the Lifelong Learning idea—encompassed the acquisition of information on such diverse topics as how-to/consumer information, cooking, car repair, genealogy, and personal finance.
- More than two out of five respondents (46.2%) indicated they “found information needed for school, work, or a community group.” In addition to Lifelong Learning, this outcome reflects the importance of the public library’s role in Formal Education Support.
- A similar proportion of respondents (41.8%) obtained “a specific fact or document I was interested in.” Such information might have included a name, address, date, statistic, law, or regulation. This type of ready reference service is central to the original conception of the General Information SR.

The high response rates for these GI outcomes indicate that library users are finding information they need, whether it was to be used to pursue a personal interest, to complete a school- or work-related assignment, or to fulfill an obligation to a community organization. It is encouraging for the

*“This morning at 6 am, my 3 year old son started asking me questions about bats. When I couldn’t answer his question, he said we needed to go to the library to get a bat book. Wesley and I shared two hours together at our library exploring the world of bats.”*

*Bruton ML  
Plant City, FL*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

profession to note that libraries appear to be meeting many different types of information needs.

The least popular outcome for this SR was more frequently reported than the least popular outcomes for the other SRs. One in six GI respondents (15.6%) “identified or contacted an organization.” These organizations included schools, social clubs, museums, historical societies, political parties, and other special interest groups. Thus, this outcome came closest to reflecting the Community Referral SR.

### Information Literacy

The list of outcomes for the Information Literacy (IL) SR was divided in two distinct sections. (See Table 17.) The first section starts with the statement, “found what I was looking for...” and filled in the blank with one to five possible outcomes. The second section starts with the statement, “learned how to...” and filled in the blank with one to seven outcomes.

**Table 17. Information Literacy Outcomes (Part 1): All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
Found what I was looking for...	
1) using the library catalogue	49.4
2) searching the World Wide Web	43.3
3) using databases	20.7
4) using reference books	27.9
5) because librarian helped me	51.1

The top three responses for the Information Literacy (IL) SR were in the “found what I was looking for” section and were selected by approximately half of the respondents. (See Table 17.)

- Over half of IL respondents (51.1%) reported finding what they needed “because a librarian helped me.”
- A similar proportion (49.4%) indicated locating a needed item “using the library catalog” (49.4%).
- Two out of five IL respondents (43.3%) located needed information by “searching the World Wide Web.”

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 18. Information Literacy Outcomes (Part 2): All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
<b>Learned how to...</b>	
6) use the library catalogue	23.2
7) ask a library staff member for help	34.3
8) use a computer	24.1
9) use standard software products	11.2
10) use e-mail, electronic mailing lists, or chat rooms	14.6
11) evaluate the quality of information on the Web	13.1
12) create a Web site	4.8

One-third of respondents indicated that they “learned how to ask a library staff member for help” (34.3%). Coupled with the above-mentioned outcome, “because a librarian helped me,” this outcome supports the role librarians and staff play in helping patrons find information and resources. So in spite of the hype that electronic resources are replacing people, librarians and other library staff continue to be an important resource at public libraries. In fact, because they are exceptionally information literate, librarians are a key link to all resources, including e-resources, which they help patrons to use better.

*“Used the library catalog, and searched the web, but couldn’t find a short story that I remembered as a child. The librarian helped find the story by using her resources. I was absolutely delighted.”*  
Moreau ML  
Buda, TX

Approximately one in four respondents said that they “learned how to use a computer” (24.1%) or “learned how to use the library catalog” (23.2%). However, books are holding their own with e-resources. Almost 28 percent (27.9%) of participants “found what I was looking for using reference books,” while 20.7 percent said, “found what I was looking for using databases.” (See Table 18.)

The least popular outcomes for this SR are both computer-related ones not typically associated with the library. “Learned how to use standard software products [word processing, spreadsheet]” (11.2%) and the rarely cited, “learned how to create a Web site” (4.8%) were the least often indicated by IL respondents.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Local History and Genealogy

Predictably, “made progress researching family history” was indicated by over half of the Local History & Genealogy (LHG) respondents (52.7%) and was thus the most popular LHG outcome. (See Table 19.) This was followed closely by “identified new source of information to search” (49.9%). Other frequently reported outcomes included:

- Two in five respondents “obtained a document or record [photo, will, land record, map]” (42.0%).
- Similarly, over one-third of respondents “shared data with others in person, in print, or online” (34.8%).

*“Using the genealogy dept.’s newspaper collection and indexes, I helped a friend locate an obituary for her uncle’s long-lost mother, from whom he was separated at an early age. He had not known anything of her whereabouts, her last married name, or her other children. Within a couple of days, he spoke with a sister he hadn’t known existed.”*

*Denver – Central Branch  
Denver, CO*

**Table 19. Local History & Genealogy Outcomes: All Respondents, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
1) Learned how to use genealogical databases	21.5
2) Made progress researching family history	52.7
3) Met or was reunited with a family member or friend	11.2
4) Learned about family medical history	4.1
5) Learned about cultural heritage	19.3
6) Shared data with others in person, in print, or online	34.8
7) Published family history	4.6
8) Identified new source of information to search	49.9
9) Met others interested in local history or genealogy	28.2
10) Did research for a school project	13.6
11) Worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate	14.2
12) Learned about my community/local history	30.0
13) Obtained a document or record	42.0

These results indicate that most genealogists who use public libraries are successful in their research, and that, through their use of public libraries, many of them are discovering and gaining access to new types of resources and documents that otherwise might not be available to them.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Other LHG outcomes were infrequently reported. With less than one in twenty selecting each, “published family history” (4.6%) and “learned about family medical history” (4.1%) had the lowest frequency of any LHG outcomes. The low response rate for the family medical history outcome is probably explained by the absence of personal medical information from the collections of most public library genealogy departments and the readier availability of such information from family members, physicians, and hospitals.

## Individual Library Results

While the patterns for all respondents in all participating libraries are interesting, a clearer picture of outcomes is revealed by focusing on data for individual libraries for which at least 50 completed user outcome surveys were received.

### Basic Literacy

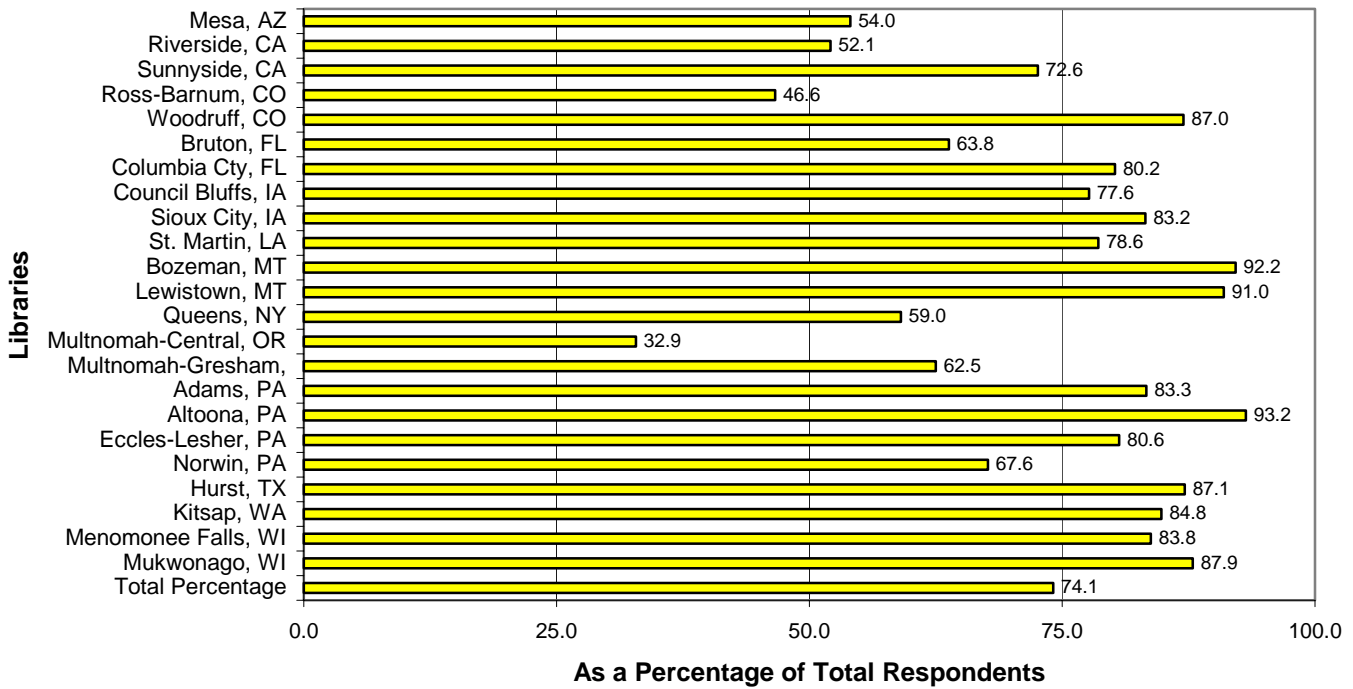
Only one library had more than 50 responses in the Basic Literacy SR, therefore individual library comparisons are not possible.

### Business and Career Information

Only one library had more than 50 responses in the Basic Literacy SR, therefore individual library comparisons are not possible.

### Library as a Place (Commons)

The percentages for the Library as a Place SR were fairly consistent from library to library with only a few noteworthy exceptions. (See Figure 1.) Responses to the outcome, “took a break at the library coffee shop or café” (13.0% total) varied from 34.0 percent in NW Reno to 4.9 percent in Council Bluffs. “Attended or participated in a public meeting” (17.9% total) had a low of 4.2 percent in Riverside and a high of 27.6 percent in Council Bluffs. These and other library-to-library differences in the Library as a Place SR may be accounted for by differences among the communities. In addition, the collections, services, programs, and facilities of individual libraries greatly influence the outcomes in this SR.



**Figure 1. Read for Pleasure Outcome: Sites with 50 or More Respondents, 2001**

## General Information

The General Information service response (SR) was the most popular, involving 23 volunteer libraries and 3,336 completed surveys. For individual libraries as well as all respondents, General Information is the most popular SR. (See Table 20.)

Three out of four library users report that they “read for pleasure,” making that the most popular outcome for most libraries. However, there are notable exceptions, both lower and higher. Of Multnomah County (Central) respondents, less than a third (32.9%) choose this outcome. Denver’s Ross-Barnum had the next lowest percentage for this outcome at 46.6 percent.

At the other end of the spectrum, nine out of ten respondents for several libraries indicated they “read for pleasure,” including: Altoona (93.2%), Bozeman (92.2%), and Lewistown (91.0%). For more than half of the participating libraries (16 out of 23), this percentage fell between 70 and 90 percent.

*“Being a ‘travel junkie’ I rely on this library’s many travel magazines and guidebooks to help plan my trips. This includes purchasing outdated travel guides for trips to Europe. The weekend travel sections of various U.S. city newspapers are also very helpful.”*

*Mesa PI  
Mesa, AZ*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 20. General Information Outcomes: Multnomah Central, 2001**

Outcomes	Multnomah	
	Central	Total
1) Read for pleasure	32.9	74.1
2) Obtained a specific fact or document	58.6	41.7
3) Leaned more about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest	29.3	55.9
4) Identified or contacted an organization	15.7	15.5
5) Found information for school, work, or a community group	53.6	46.3
6) Shared a cultural experience or exchanged info w/ others	5.7	19.4
7) Learned more about a legal, social, or political issue	22.9	23.8
8) Met new people with whom I share common interests	4.3	22.1

More than half of GI respondents reported that they “learned more about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest,” making this the second most popular GI outcome. For most GI libraries (17 out of 23), the percentage of respondents marking this outcome was within 10 points of the total figure for all GI libraries, however, among individual libraries, there are also extremes for this outcome. Of Multnomah (Central) respondents, less than a third (29.3%) chose this outcome, but, of Kitsap respondents, more than three out of four (75.2%) chose it.

Only one out of six General Information (GI) respondents (15.8%) “identified or contacted an organization,” making that the least popular GI outcome. For most individual libraries, this percentage was under 20 percent with three notable exceptions. Of Queens respondents, almost a third (29.5%) chose this community referral outcome. About one in five respondents for Columbia County and Sioux City (22.5% and 20.0%, respectively) chose it.

*“Being able to go and sit at the library for research and study allowed me to eventually go back to school and obtain a University of Oregon BA degree.”*  
*Multnomah – Central Branch  
 Portland, OR*

Only one library consistently bucked the trend for all GI respondents. While almost three out of four GI respondents (74.1%) reported “read[ing] for pleasure,” less than a third of Multnomah (Central) respondents chose that outcome. Conversely, compared with all GI respondents, Multnomah library users were more likely to report that they had “obtained a specific fact or document” (58.6% v. 41.7%) and “found information for school, work, or a community group” (53.6% v. 46.3%). The contrasting results for Multnomah (Central) and all GI respondents indicate that this library is perhaps more focused on education and information than recreation.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Despite its apparent emphases on formal education support and general reference, this library nonetheless had notably low percentages of respondents selecting related Information Literacy outcomes. Only one out of eight Multnomah (Central) respondents “found what I was looking for using reference books” (12.4%) and “learned how to use the library catalogue” (13.4%). For all IL respondents, the percentages for those outcomes were twice as high. The data from this SR also suggests that this library fulfills significantly different roles than some of the other libraries in this survey. This particular library highlights one of the important findings of this study. Although library users generate many common and related outcomes, there are notable differences from one library to another. A service response is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, applying equally well to all libraries. Even for libraries focusing on the same service response, dramatic differences in services and user profiles may exist.

## Information Literacy

Two libraries in the Information Literacy SR had eight of the twelve highest percentages reported for individual libraries in this SR. (See Table 21.) Orange County dominated the electronic responses with

- “searching the World Wide Web” (64.7%),
- “use e-mail, electronic mailing lists, or chat rooms (43.1%)”,
- “evaluate the quality of information on the Web” (27.5%), and
- “created a Web site” (15.7%).

In more traditional services, Nazareth led the other libraries with

- “using reference books” (38.5%),
- “because a librarian helped me” (56.9% - tie with Orange County),
- “use the library catalogue” (43.1%), and
- “ask a library staff member for help” (51.1%).

*“We are visiting your lovely country, on our holiday. We come from Denmark and came here to send e-mail to our family. Since we had this Hotmail address, we at the same time received an important message, that we could answer right away.”*

*Nazareth PL  
Nazareth, PA*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 21. Information Literacy Outcomes: Orange County & Nazareth, 2001**

Outcomes	Orange County	Nazareth	As a Percentage of Total Respondents
<u>Found what I was looking for...</u>			
1) using the library catalogue	35.3	43.1	49.0
2) searching the World Wide Web	64.7	42.0	43.1
3) using databases	27.5	13.2	20.3
4) using reference books	27.5	38.5	28.1
5) because librarian helped me	56.9	56.9	51.6
<u>Learned how to...</u>			
6) use the library catalogue	15.7	31.0	23.1
7) ask a library staff member for help	37.3	51.1	34.4
8) use a computer	37.3	20.7	24.7
9) use standard software products	23.5	5.7	10.9
10) use e-mail, electronic mailing lists, or chat rooms	43.1	9.2	14.9
11) evaluate the quality of information on the Web	27.5	15.5	13.2
12) create a Web site	15.7	4.6	5.0

Once again individual libraries are meeting their patrons' needs in significantly different ways. Each library is fulfilling a different role for its users, meeting their needs in unique and specific ways.

### Local History and Genealogy

Participating libraries received remarkably consistent responses from their users regarding Local History and Genealogy outcomes. However, there are a few interesting differences which seem to illustrate the focus of individual library services in this arena. (See Table 22.)

For example, at Cherokee Regional, two out of three LHG users (66.7%) "made progress researching family history," while in Boulder, only one out of six LHG users (18.0%) reported that genealogy outcome. Conversely, though, Boulder had the highest percentages in three of the local history outcomes, including:

*"We were happy to discover the home we just purchased had a historical photo so we are able to see the home's history. It is also helping us to restore the home to its original state."*

*Boulder PL  
Boulder, CO*

- "learned about cultural heritage" (26.0% v. 20.1% overall),
- "worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate" (32.0% v. 14.5% overall), and
- "learned about my community/local history" (60.0% v. 31.5% overall).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 22. Local History and Genealogy Outcomes: Boulder, 2001**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Boulder</b>	<b>As a Percentage of Total Respondents</b>
1) Learned how to use genealogical databases	15.0	22.5
2) Made progress researching family history	18.0	51.8
3) Met or was reunited with a family member or friend	7.0	11.2
4) Learned about family medical history	2.0	4.0
5) Learned about cultural heritage	26.0	20.1
6) Shared data with others in person, in print, or online	33.0	35.9
7) Published family history	5.0	4.9
8) Identified new source of information to search	47.0	48.4
9) Met others interested in local history or genealogy	28.0	28.6
10) Did research for a school project	22.0	15.0
11) Worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate	32.0	14.5
12) Learned about my community/local history	60.0	31.5
13) Obtained a document or record	47.0	44.0

The Boulder numbers suggest that local history is a significantly different activity, pursued by a different type of user, than genealogy. These differences in reported outcomes may also reflect that Boulder library's emphasis on local history. While the library also houses a genealogy collection, those materials are managed by the local genealogical society. The library merely provides space for the collection and its users.

## Overall Results by Key Demographic Groups

Some of the most interesting findings of the CoR study concern differences in outcomes reported by various demographic groups. Frequently, differences in outcomes by gender, age, and education confirm long-held beliefs about library usage by members of selected groups. At other times, the findings were less predictable, shedding new light on the ends to which public libraries are utilized by various groups. Some of the statistically significant outcomes are highlighted below, followed by a detailed discussion of each demographic factor and its impact on outcomes.

### Gender Differences in Outcomes

- Women were more likely to have "read for pleasure," or "made progress researching family history"

## Counting on Results

### New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- Men were more likely to have “explored new business options, started or developed a business” or found what they were looking for “searching the World Wide Web”

### Age Differences in Outcomes

- Seniors aged 60 and over were more apt to have “read for pleasure,” “enjoyed a lecture, concert, film or other public event,” or “learned how to use a computer”
- Respondents from 40 to 59 were most likely to have “learned about new books, videos, or music,” or “obtained a specific fact or document,”
- Adult respondents aged 25 to 39 were most likely to have “became a citizen,” or “explored new business options, started or developed a business”
- Younger respondents, 24 and under, were most apt to have “completed or made progress on school work,” or found what they were looking for “using reference books”

### Education Difference in Outcomes

- College graduates were more likely to have “read for pleasure,” “enjoyed a lecture, concert, film, or other public event,” or “worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate”
- Respondents with less than a college education were more likely to have “explored jobs or careers, or determined necessary education or training,” “made progress researching family history,” or “learned how to ask a library staff member for help”

## Results by Service Response & Demographic Group

Generally, differences in outcomes reported by different library user groups are interesting to observe. Additional insights may be obtained, however, by reviewing these differences by service response (SR).

### Gender

Across all six service responses, there were statistically significant gender differences for about a third of CoR outcomes (21 out of 64). This is the lowest number of significant differences for the three types of demographic groups under study. Within the gender

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

demographic, Basic Literacy had the most significant outcome differences by gender (eight), followed by General Information (five). At the other end of the spectrum, Library as a Place and Business and Career Information each only had one significant gender-based outcome difference.

### Basic Literacy

The Basic Literacy SR had eight outcomes for which there were statistically significant gender-based responses. (See Table 23.) By large margins, men more frequently than women “helped a child do homework or improve grades” (21.1% v. 7.0%) and “applied for a job” (26.3% v. 9.6%). In addition, men were almost twice as likely to have “wrote a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone” (42.1% v. 24.3%) and “participated in a community activity” (39.5% v. 20.9%).

**Table 23. Basic Literacy Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Prepared for GED	Percentage within Gender	2.6	10.5	4.6
Passed the GED	Percentage within Gender	0.9	15.8	4.6
Prepared for the naturalization exam	Percentage within Gender	2.6	13.2	5.2
Became a citizen	Percentage within Gender	50.4	26.3	44.4
Helped child do homework/improve grades	Percentage within Gender	7.0	21.1	10.5
Applied for a job	Percentage within Gender	9.6	26.3	13.7
Participated in a community activity	Percentage within Gender	20.9	39.5	25.5
Wrote a letter/postcard/e-mail	Percentage within Gender	24.3	42.1	28.8

Men “prepared for the GED” (10.5% v. 4.6%), “passed the GED” (15.8% v. 4.6%), and “prepared for the naturalization exam” (13.2% v. 5.2%) more than women. However, women were more likely to report that they “became a citizen” (50.4%)—almost twice as often as men (26.3%). It should be noted that although these are statistically significant differences in response rates between men and women, both the overall number of respondents for this service response and this outcome were low.

### Business & Career Information

Only one outcome in the Business and Career Information SR was significantly different between men and women. (See Table 24.) Two in five men (44.7%), but fewer than one in three women (30.3%), “explored new business options, [or] started or developed a

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

business.” It is interesting to note that, according to the Census Bureau, by 1997, 26 percent of businesses were owned by women, compared with 55% owned by men. (Other ownership types included: equally-owned at 17 percent and public, foreign, and nonprofit at two percent).

**Table 24. Business & Career Information Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcome	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Explored new business options, started or developed a business	Percentage within Gender	30.3	44.7	35.4

### Library as a Place (Commons)

For several service responses, men indicate that they use World Wide Web technologies more than women. (See Table 25.) For example, the Library as a Place SR had only one gender-based outcome difference—“visited library-sponsored chat room on the Web”—that was statistically significant. Although the number of respondents for this outcome was generally low, a notably higher proportion of males (8.6%) indicated this outcome than females (3.0%).

**Table 25. Library as a Place (Commons) Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcome	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Visited library-sponsored chat room on the Web	Percentage within Gender	3.0	8.6	4.8

### Information Literacy

Similarly, in the Information Literacy SR over half of men (55.3%) indicated they found what they were looking for “searching the World Wide Web,” whereas a little over a third of women (37.4%) did so. (See Table 26.) Men learned how to “use e-mail, electronic mailing lists, or

*“Believe free Internet access provided by library helps bridge ‘digital divide.’ Since I can’t afford computer or Internet access, I rely on the library’s computers. I have been able to locate and develop free Internet web pages for a nonprofit association.”*

*Surfer dude  
Moreau ML  
Buda, TX*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

chat rooms” (18.4%) and “evaluate the quality of information on the Web” (17.0%) more than women (11.8% and 11.1% respectively). This supports the common belief that men are more technology-oriented than women.

It also sheds light on the Basic Literacy SR, “wrote a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone” being chosen by two out of five men (42.1%), but by only one in four women (24.3%). It is probable that the e-mail component of that outcome is the influencing factor in the response results, i.e., more men chose this outcome because they were using e-mail, not because they were writing a letter or postcard.

**Table 26. Information Literacy Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Found what I was looking for...				
using the library catalogue	Percentage within Gender	57.1	36.9	50.0
searching the World Wide Web	Percentage within Gender	37.4	55.3	43.7
Learned how to...				
use e-mail, e-mailing lists, or chat rooms	Percentage within Gender	11.8	18.4	14.2
evaluate the quality of information on the Web	Percentage within Gender	11.1	17.0	13.1

Women, however, seek out tools to help them find library materials more often than men. In the Information Literacy SR, over half of women (57.1%) indicated that they found what they were looking for “using the library catalogue,” but only about a third of men (36.9%) indicated this outcome.

### General Information

In the General Information Service Response (SR), women (79.3% v. 63.1% for men) dominated the most popular outcome in the CoR study, “read for pleasure.” (See Table 27.) Women also led in “found information for school, work, or a community group” (49.3% v. 40.3% for men) and “shared a cultural experience and/or exchanged information with others” (20.3% v. 17.3%). Men focused on facts and specific information, indicating significantly more often than women that they “obtained a specific fact or document” (45.5% v. 40.2% for women) and “learned more about a legal, social, or political issue” (29.9% v. 21.0%).

*“Have used library references on auto repair with great success for years.”*

*Resourceful young man  
Sunnyside RL  
Fresno, CA*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 27. General Information Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Read for pleasure	Percentage within Gender	79.3	63.1	74.4
Obtained a specific fact or document	Percentage within Gender	40.2	45.5	41.8
Found info for school/work/community group	Percentage within Gender	49.3	40.3	46.6
Shared cultural experience &/or exchanged info w/ others	Percentage within Gender	20.3	17.3	19.4
Learned more about a legal, social, or political issue	Percentage within Gender	21.0	29.9	23.7

### Local History & Genealogy

Women were more active in genealogy with over half indicating they “made progress researching family history” (56.3%). (See Table 28.) Less than half of men (47.5%) reported such success. In addition, women “met others interested in local history or genealogy” (32.4%) more often than men (23.5%).

**Table 28. Local History & Genealogy Outcomes by Gender, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Gender		
		Female	Male	All
Made progress researching family history	Percentage within Gender	56.3	47.5	52.7
Met others interested in local history/genealogy	Percentage within Gender	32.4	23.5	28.7

### Age

Age was divided into five categories, 24 and under, 25 to 39, 40 to 59, and 60 or over. This demographic demonstrated the greatest number of outcome differences between groups. There were statistically significant differences based on age for over half of the CoR outcomes (33 out of 64).

### Basic Literacy

Surprisingly, the 60 and over age group was way out in front on three of the Basic Literacy outcomes, “improved my reading, writing, or math skills” (44.4%), “prepared for GED” (22.2%), and “prepared for the naturalization exam” (22.2%). (See Table 29.) The 24 and

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

under age group took second place for these outcomes with approximately 10 percent indicating each.

Three out of four younger adults (ages 25-39) indicated that they “became a citizen.” The age group least likely to choose this outcome was seniors (ages 60 and over) at only one in ten. Overwhelmingly, the youngest group (ages 24 and under) was the one most likely to indicate they “wrote a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone” (40.5%). That age group’s dominance of the category can undoubtedly be attributed to the “e-mail” component of the outcome.

**Table 29. Basic Literacy Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Improved reading/writing/math	Percentage within Age	10.1	0.0	5.6	44.4	9.0
Prepared for GED	Percentage within Age	8.9	0.0	0.0	22.2	5.8
Prepared for the naturalization exam	Percentage within Age	10.1	3.1	0.0	22.2	7.1
Became a citizen	Percentage within Age	34.2	75.0	41.7	11.1	42.9
Wrote a letter/postcard/e-mail	Percentage within Age	40.5	18.8	13.9	11.1	28.2

### Business & Career Information

Three outcomes in the Business and Career Information SR followed a logical age pattern that was statistically significant. (See Table 30.) For example, it is little surprise that younger respondents were more likely to have “explored jobs or careers, or determined necessary education or training” (52.9%). Likewise, it was predictable that the likelihood of respondents having “made better investment or retirement decisions” was greatest after age sixty (45.1%). Of adults in their prime working years, predictably high percentages had “explored new business options, [or] started or developed a business” (53.6% for ages 25 to 39, 35.3% for ages 40 to 59). Thus, outcomes for this SR were dictated by the respondent’s stage in working life, i.e., early or pre-career, mid-career, or retirement.

*“Research at the library has helped us increase sales for our manufacturer’s representative agency.”*

*Working woman  
Mesa PL  
Mesa, AZ*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 30. Business & Career Information Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Explored new business options, started/developed business or	Percentage within Age	23.5	53.6	35.3	19.6	35.4
Explored job/career or determined necessary education/training	Percentage within Age	52.9	30.4	28.4	13.7	27.5
Made better investment or retirement decisions	Percentage within Age	11.8	8.9	27.6	45.1	25.8

### Library as a Place (Commons)

In the Library as a Place service response (SR), older library users were more likely to report participating in social activities or seeking out an organization via the library. (See Table 31.) Seniors were more likely to have

- “learned about or [been] referred to another community organization’ (19.1%),
- “enjoyed a lecture, concert, film or other public event (49.1%), and
- “attended or participated in a public meeting” (31.8%).

Perhaps this age group has more time and leisure than others to pursue activities at the library.

**Table 31. Library as a Place (Commons) Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Learned about new books, videos, or music	Percentage within Age	62.3	67.2	74.7	57.3	66.7
Completed/made progress on school work	Percentage within Age	52.5	30.3	21.6	3.6	26.8
Learned about/referred to community organization	Percentage within Age	9.0	11.8	18.9	19.1	15.2
Enjoyed a lecture/concert/film/public event	Percentage within Age	12.3	17.6	27.4	49.1	26.2
Attended or participated in a public meeting	Percentage within Age	3.3	13.4	16.8	31.8	16.1
Visited library-sponsored chat room on the Web	Percentage within Age	9.8	5.9	3.7	0.0	4.8

Predictably, younger respondents were more apt to indicate that they used library resources to do school work. The youngest group was the most likely to have “completed or made progress on school work” (52%). They were also more likely to have “visited a library-sponsored chat room on the Web” (9.8%), though at less than one in ten, this is a relatively small proportion of that age group.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Most adults (67.2% for ages 25 to 39, almost 75% for ages 40 to 59) reported that they “learned about new books, videos, or music” at their libraries. In fact, over 60 percent of all respondents indicated that they rely on the library for information about new materials.

Obviously, the library continues to be an important place to find out about books, videos, and music, especially for busy adult patrons.

*“I attended a writing class for the elderly and completed a short book of stories about my life. My husband and I participated in a public discussion on foreign policy. We also enjoy the cooking demonstrations given at the library.”*

*Active Senior  
NW Reno PL  
Reno, NV*

### General Information

All but one of the outcomes in the General Information SR was statistically significant. (See Table 32.) No single age group dominates all GI outcomes, suggesting that this group of services includes something for all age groups. “Read for pleasure” was indicated more often as respondents aged with the 60 and over group at 84.6 percent and 40 to 59 group at 77.0 percent. The oldest group was also likeliest to report having “shared a cultural experience and/or exchanged information with others” (23.4%). Seniors were followed closely on this outcome by the youngest age group (22.2%). Once again, the youngest group led in the school work outcome with nearly seven out of ten indicating they “found information needed for school, work or a community group” (67.7%). As might be expected, the percentage for this outcome dropped progressively with each older age group.

*“My 87 year old father is going blind and cannot read. The library staff has been very helpful by suggesting taped books and has requested books from other libraries that he is interested in. He now enjoys an evening listening to these books.”*

*Woodruff ML  
La Junta, CO*

**Table 32. General Information Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Read for pleasure	Percentage within Age	62.6	71.6	77.0	84.6	74.3
Obtained a specific fact or document	Percentage within Age	36.9	41.9	44.1	41.7	41.6
Learned more about skill/hobby/personal interest	Percentage within Age	51.4	57.1	58.9	54.4	56.0
Identified or contacted an organization	Percentage within Age	17.0	18.9	14.0	12.5	15.5
Found info for school/work/community group	Percentage within Age	67.7	50.3	42.9	25.1	46.2
Shared cultural experience &/or exchanged info w/ others	Percentage within Age	22.2	15.8	17.9	23.4	19.4
Met new people with whom I share common interest	Percentage within Age	28.5	20.4	17.7	25.1	22.0

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

“Met new people with whom I share common interests” was also indicated more often by the 24 and under group (28.5%) with it dipping in the middle years and going back up in the 60 and over group (25.1%). “Identified or contacted an organization” peaked in the 25 to 39 age group (18.9%) and gradually dropped off. Peaking in the 40 to 59 age group were the two outcomes “Learned more about a skill, hobby, or other personal interest” (58.9%) and “obtained a specific fact or document” (44.1%).

*“Have discovered more about good nutrition through your [library] books. As a result I have a much healthier family.”*

*Adult  
Hurst PL  
Hurst, TX*

### Information Literacy

For the Information Literacy SR, the 24 and under age group was most likely to report three out of five outcomes for which differences by age group were statistically significant. (See Table 33.) More often than older groups, this youngest group reported

- “using a reference book” (42.2%),
- “ask[ing] a library staff member for help” (42.2%), and
- “creat[ing] a Web site” (8.9%).

The respondents in the oldest age group were the most inclined to have “learned how to use a computer” (45.9%) indicating that libraries are helping close the digital divide for seniors. Younger adults (25-39) were most likely to find what they were looking for “using a library catalogue” (56.9%).

**Table 33. Information Literacy Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Found what I was looking for...						
using the library catalogue	Percentage within Age	47.2	56.9	52.9	37.8	50.3
using reference books	Percentage within Age	42.2	20.1	23.8	23.0	28.4
Learned how to...						
ask a library staff member for help	Percentage within Age	42.2	29.2	29.1	40.5	34.6
use a computer	Percentage within Age	16.7	17.4	27.0	45.9	23.9
create a Web site	Percentage within Age	8.9	2.8	3.2	1.4	4.6

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Local History & Genealogy

There is a linear progression in the response to the Local History and Genealogy outcomes. (See Table 34.)

Generally, as respondents aged, they were more apt to indicate each of these outcomes. Members of the 60 and over age group were most likely to report that they had

- “made progress researching family history” (63.2%),
- “learned about cultural heritage” (22.8%),
- “shared data with others in person, in print, or online” (39.8%), and
- “obtained a document or record” (45.6%).

*“Found book (an index to Indiana marriages) and it listed names of great grandparents, the date and place of their marriage. With this info, able to write to Rush County, IN and secure copy of their 1872 license.”*

*Senior researcher  
Orange County LS  
Orlando, FL*

Similarly, those in their middle and senior years (55.3% of those 40-59, 52.6% of those 60 and over) “identified a new source of information to search.” One in three people 25 and older indicated they “met with others interested in local history or genealogy” but, only a meager one in 25 of the youngest age group (24 and under) reported that outcome.

As might be anticipated, “did research for a school project” was indicated by most often by respondent in the 24 and under group (66.7%). It is to be expected that school-age respondents would be most apt to indicate outcomes that involved such research.

**Table 34. Local History & Genealogy Outcomes by Age Group, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Age Group				
		≤ 24	25-39	40-59	≥ 60	All
Made progress researching family history	Percentage within Age	16.7	42.3	56.5	63.2	52.7
Met others interested in local history/genealogy	Percentage within Age	3.7	31.0	31.2	31.0	28.3
Learned about cultural heritage	Percentage within Age	5.6	15.5	21.1	22.8	19.3
Shared data with others in person/print/online	Percentage within Age	24.1	25.4	37.1	39.8	35.1
Identified new source of information to search	Percentage within Age	31.5	43.7	55.3	52.6	50.5
Did research for a school project	Percentage within Age	66.7	15.5	9.3	1.2	13.3
Obtained a document or record	Percentage within Age	20.4	42.3	44.3	45.6	42.0

### Education

The results for two out of every five CoR outcomes (25 out of 64) contained differences based on level of educational attainment that were statistically significant.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Basic Literacy

Remarkably, for the Basic Literacy SR, only three out of thirteen outcomes demonstrated statistically significant differences based on educational attainment. (See Table 35.) “Helped a child do homework or improve grades” was far more likely to be an outcome for college graduates (21.6%) than for those with less education (6.6%). However, one in ten of those without a college degree “prepared for the naturalization exam” (9.4%) and no college graduates reported this outcome. Non-college graduates were also twice as likely to have “[written] a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone” (33.0%). This statistic is probably driven by young adults using e-mail at the library.

*“We have wonderful success with home education because of Grand Prairie Library. They have co-operated with us. We have held classes here. The library has always purchased books for circulation that we need in our curriculum”*

*College graduate  
Grand Prairie PL  
Hazel Crest, IL*

**Table 35. Basic Literacy Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
Prepared for the naturalization exam	Percentage within Education	9.4	0.0	7.0
Helped a child do homework/improve grades	Percentage within Education	6.6	21.6	10.5
Wrote a letter/postcard/e-mail	Percentage within Education	33.0	16.2	28.7

### Business & Career Information

Differences between educational attainment groups were statistically significant for only a quarter (two out of eight) of Business and Career Information (BCI) outcomes. (See Table 36.) Less educated respondents were more likely to have “explored jobs or careers, or determined necessary education or training” (33.3% v. 21.8% for college graduates) and “developed job-related skills” (36.8% v. 24.4%). These findings suggest that libraries are providing many school-age users and other non-college graduates with important employment information that is not as frequently sought by college graduates.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 36. Business & Career Information Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
Developed job-related skills	% within Education	36.8	24.4	30.5
Explored job/career or determined necessary education/training	% within Education	33.3	21.8	27.5

### Library as a Place (Commons)

The Library as a Place service response (SR) revealed that college graduates were more likely to interact with others at the library and to participate in social activities. (See Table 37.) Specifically, they were more likely to have

- “met a friend or co-worker” (34.2%),
- “enjoyed a lecture, concert, film or other public event” (36.8%), and/or
- “attended or participated in a public meeting” (25.5%).

Similarly, they were more likely to have “learned about or [to have been] referred to another community organization” (19.9%). This is consistent with the General Information outcome, “identified or contacted an organization” which was also chosen by more college graduates (17.5%). Understandably, those without a college degree were more likely to have “completed or made progress on school work” (31.5%). This would encompass those younger patrons still in school, as well as adults returning to school to complete a degree.

**Table 37. Library as a Place (Commons) Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
Met a friend/co-worker	Percentage within Education	25.6	34.2	29.4
Completed or made progress on school work	Percentage within Education	31.5	19.9	26.3
Learned about/referred to community organization	Percentage within Education	11.8	19.9	15.4
Enjoyed a lecture/concert/film/public event	Percentage within Education	17.6	36.8	26.2
Attended or participated in a public meeting	Percentage within Education	9.7	25.5	16.7

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### General Information

Differences between college graduates and others were statistically significant for more than half of the General Information (GI) outcomes (5 out of 8). (See Table 38.)

The most popular outcome, “read for pleasure,” was reported more frequently by college graduates (78.5%) than non-graduates (71.9%). College graduates were also more likely to have:

- “obtained a specific fact” (46.5%),
- “shared a cultural experience and/or exchanged information with others” (21.85), and, as mentioned earlier,
- “identified or contacted an organization” (17.5%).

*“Ever since the terrorist crash of Pan Am Flight 103, I had the uneasy feeling that a soldier with whom I’d served had died in that Lockerbie crash. Finally, I asked a reference librarian if she could produce a passenger list – and she did (from microfilm). My friend HAD NOT been aboard! Great relief!*

*College Graduate  
Altoona Area PL  
Altoona, PA*

**Table 38. General Information Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
Read for pleasure	Percentage within Education	71.9	78.5	74.5
Obtained a specific fact or document	Percentage within Education	39.4	46.5	42.1
Identified or contacted an organization	Percentage within Education	14.1	17.5	15.4
Shared a cultural experience &/or exchanged info with others	Percentage within Education	18.3	21.8	19.6
Met new people with whom I share common interests	Percentage within Education	23.8	19.2	22.0

Non-college graduates were more likely to have “met new people with whom I share common interests” (23.8%). This suggests the possibility of a fine distinction between educational attainment groups, considering the findings reported earlier for the Library as a Place SR. At libraries studying that SR, college graduates indicated they were more likely to engage in social activities at the library than non-graduates. The latter group, it would appear, is more inclined to visit the library to meet like-minded individuals, rather than groups.

### Information Literacy

The findings for the Information Literacy service response (SR) indicate that libraries are teaching non-college graduates information-seeking skills and helping close the “Digital Divide” that separates many of them from college graduates. (See Table 39.) Respondents with less formal education were more likely to have learned to

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- “use the library catalogue” (28.1% v. 16.4% for college graduates), and
- “ask a library staff member for help” (38.3% v. 28.0%),
- “use e-mail, electronic mailing lists, or chat rooms” (17.8% v. 6.8%) or
- “create a Web site” (7.0% v. 1%).

**Table 39. Information Literacy Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
<b>Found what I was looking for...</b>				
using the library catalogue	Percentage within Education	46.8	58.5	51.2
<b>Learned how to...</b>				
use the library catalogue	Percentage within Education	28.1	16.4	23.7
ask a library staff member for help	Percentage within Education	38.3	28.0	34.4
use e-mail/electronic mailing lists/chat rooms	Percentage within Education	17.8	6.8	13.7
create a Web site	Percentage within Education	7.0	1.0	4.7

Undoubtedly, these findings are influenced by the number of young adults and college-age patrons using electronic resources and the likelihood that, for those with less education and consequently lower incomes, the library may provide access to technology tools they might not have otherwise.

College graduates were more likely to have found what they were looking for “using the library catalogue” (58.5% v. 46.8% for non-college graduates).

### Local History & Genealogy

Respondents without a college degree were more likely to report two out of the five Local History and Genealogy (LHG) outcomes for which there were statistically significant differences based on education. (See Table 40.) Those with less formal education indicated that they “learned how to use genealogical databases” (25.9%) and “made progress researching family history” (58.6%).

College graduates were more likely to have

- “learned about cultural heritage” (23.2%),
- “worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate” (20.0%), and

*“Able to research a house on Arapahoe St. (Denver), and eventually get it on the National Register of Historic Places. House had been condemned and was do to be raised.”*

*College graduate  
Denver – Central Branch*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

- “obtained a document or record” (46.4%).

While it is little surprise that college graduates use public libraries to pursue these interests, it is somewhat surprising to find that less educated users are more successful at using libraries for genealogical research. It may simply be that those with less formal education are more likely than college graduates to make the time in their lives to pursue what is often very tedious, labor-intensive, time-consuming research.

**Table 40. Local History & Genealogy Outcomes by Education, 2001**

Outcomes	Responses	Education		
		< College Degree	College Degree	All
Learned to use genealogical databases	Percentage within Education	25.9	18.2	21.8
Made progress researching family history	Percentage within Education	58.6	47.5	52.6
Learned about cultural heritage	Percentage within Education	15.1	23.2	19.5
Obtained a document or record	Percentage within Education	37.7	46.4	42.4
Worked on historic preservation, renovation, or real estate	Percentage within Education	7.9	20.0	14.5

## Overall Pattern

Age is the most statistically significant demographic factor across the various CoR service responses. Three types of users are revealed by the data—youth, adult, and senior. The youth patron uses the library to study and use computer resources. The adult patron uses the library for focused research and reading materials. The senior patron uses the library for recreational activities including reading for pleasure and social gatherings, as well as for learning and educational purposes.

### Youth

The 24 and under age group used the library primarily for schoolwork and other education-related activities. (See Table 41.) This age group dominated all the outcomes that mention “school work” and related outcomes like “found what I was looking for using reference books.” School-age patrons also are more apt to be using computer resources at the library. Two factors are undoubtedly influencing these results: 1) young people tend to be highly computer savvy, and 2) libraries are helping to close the digital divide among school-age patrons.

*“I was able to easily find monologues that helped me prepare for my audition for theatre school.”*

*Young actress  
Altoona PL  
Altoona, PA*

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

**Table 41. Positive & Statistically Significant Outcomes Related to Youth, 2001**

Outcome	Service Response
<b>Young people were more likely to have...</b>	
Wrote a letter, postcard or e-mail message to someone	Basic Literacy
Explored job/career or determined education/training	Business/Career Information
Completed or made progress on school work	Library as a Place (Commons)
Visited library-sponsored chat room on the Web	Library as a Place (Commons)
Found information for school, work or a community group	General Information
Met new people with whom I share common interests	General Information
Found...using reference books	Information Literacy
Learned how to ask a library staff member for help	Information Literacy
Learned how to create a Web site	Information Literacy
Did research for a school project	Local History and Genealogy

### Adult

Adult users tend to be more goal-oriented, especially in the 25 to 39 age group. (See Table 42.) They go to the library for a specific purpose or piece of information. For example, this group was most apt to indicate that they “explored new business options, [or] started or developed a business.” In the older adult group, 40 to 59, adult users begin to utilize the library more for leisure time activities, like finding a book or information about a personal interested. Both of these adult age groups tend to have a specific purpose for going to the library and tend not to visit the library to attend group events.

*“When I was buying my new car, I used the library for information which helped me make my decision.”*  
*Bruton ML*  
*Plant City, FL*

**Table 42. Positive & Statistically Significant Outcomes Related to Adults, 2001**

Outcome	Service Response
<b>Adults 25 to 39 were more likely to have...</b>	
Became a citizen	Basic Literacy
Explored/started/developed a business	Business/Career Information
Identified or contacted an organization	General Information
Found...using the library catalogue	Information Literacy
<b>Adults 40 to 59 were more likely to have...</b>	
Learned about new books, videos, or music	Library as a Place (Commons)
Obtained a specific fact of document	General Information
Learned more about a skill/hobby/personal interest	General Information
Identified new source of information to search	Local History and Genealogy
Met others interested in local history	Local History and Genealogy

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Senior

The senior group (age 60 and over) utilized the library in the greatest variety of ways. (See Table 43.) Members of this age group are inclined to visit the library to attend a meeting or cultural event or to socialize, and to borrow leisure reading materials. In

addition, this group is the most likely to be active in genealogy, cultural, or historical research. Seniors are also using library resources for lifelong learning as well as to develop basic literacy and computer skills.

*“Started reading library books at age 4. PL has been great source of research through HS, college and graduate school – very enriching experience now that I am retired.”*

*Lifelong learner  
Multnomah – Gresham Branch  
Portland, OR*

**Table 43. Positive & Statistically Significant Outcomes Related to Seniors, 2001**

Outcome	Service Response
<b>Seniors 60 and over were more likely to have...</b>	
Improved my reading, writing, or math skills	Basic Literacy
Prepared for GED	Basic Literacy
Prepared for the naturalization exam	Basic Literacy
Made better investment or retirement decisions	Business/Career Information
Learned about/referred to another community organization	Library as a Place (Commons)
Enjoyed a lecture, concert, film, or other public event	Library as a Place (Commons)
Attended or participated in a public meeting	Library as a Place (Commons)
Read for Pleasure	General Information
Shared cultural experience and/or exchanged info w/others	General Information
Learned how to use a computer	Information Literacy
Made progress researching family history	Local History and Genealogy
Learned about cultural heritage	Local History and Genealogy
Shared data with others in person, in print or online	Local History and Genealogy
Obtained a document or record	Local History and Genealogy

The overall results of user outcome surveys go far toward helping library managers and decision-makers to understand how and why patrons use public libraries. The power of such data is magnified dramatically, however, when demographic characteristics of patrons are added to the picture. While many of the results for specific demographic groups (e.g., women, seniors, the college-educated) serve to confirm popular conceptions that are not especially surprising, some of the group results are more revelatory, calling into question existing assumptions about who uses public libraries for what, and why. Those who plan and administer library services to their communities should make it a priority to collect and analyze this type of data regularly. Otherwise, they have little alternative but to rely upon

# **Counting on Results**

## **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

personal biases, social stereotypes, and casual observations of local patrons. Generally, the CoR user outcome surveys were very successful in eliciting information about specific outcomes of public library service directly from patrons.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 6 Applying the Data

Combined, library output and user outcome statistics provide a wealth of valuable information for decision-makers. These types of data are applied to a wide variety of purposes, including, but not limited to:

- planning new initiatives;
- improving what already exists;
- justifying budgets;
- re-allocating scarce resources (e.g., staff, dollars);
- publicizing the library's value and contribution to its community;
- assessing service quality; and
- evaluating departmental or individual staff performance.

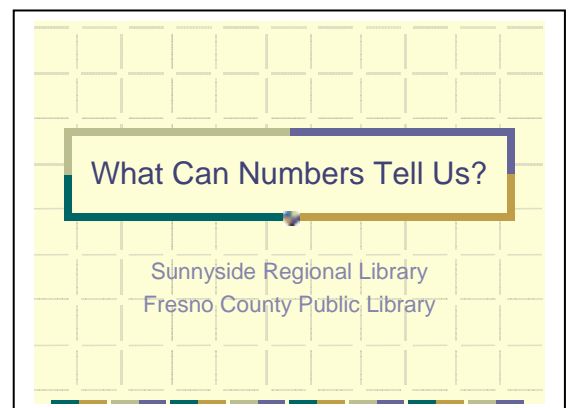
The utility of data for these purposes depends largely on the users understanding of how to identify appropriate data, how to analyze and present it, and how to learn something from each round of data collection activity that improves the next one. Usually, decision-makers seek this type of information to answer questions, but perhaps the more valuable role of such efforts is to raise questions that might not otherwise have been asked. Sometimes the new question raised is even more valuable than the answer to the original question.

The first part of this chapter describes how the manager of a Counting on Results (CoR) library might analyze and present the data yielded by this project. The second part offers several recommendations regarding what library managers might learn from this project to improve its own future data collection efforts.

## Analyzing & Presenting CoR

### Output & Outcome Data

While library output and user outcome data must be analyzed to determine their meaning and best use, the power of these statistics will not be activated until they are presented. Accordingly, this chapter offers a sample Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled *What Can Numbers Tell Us?* that was developed using data




# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

for Sunnyside Regional Library, a branch of the Fresno Public Library. This example illustrates how library output and user outcome statistics might be displayed and analyzed in tandem, as well as the types of questions that might be asked, answered, and raised by such data. The audience for this presentation might be a library board, staff, friends group, planning committee, or a group of public officials (e.g., a city or town council, a county commission).


While decision-makers for a particular library will be primarily interested in their own library's results, it is advisable to first introduce them to the context of the project rather than jump directly into the data. That context includes both Planning for Results (PfR), the Public Library Association's planning process, and the Counting on Results project.

Important points for an audience to understand are that PfR is based on a resource allocation model, connects library outputs and outcomes, and encourages collection of library output and user outcome data. In describing the Counting on Results (CoR) project, points to emphasize include the PfR service responses (SRs)—particularly General Information (and the SRs incorporated into it)—and the two data collection mechanisms utilized: the Palm organizer for recorded output and observed activities data, and the postcard (and Web) surveys that collected user outcomes. Finally, by way of introduction, the intended value of the data should be established. The expectation is that the audience will utilize the data to examine the library's operations, consider how and why patrons use the library, evaluate how well the library meets community needs, and raise questions that might not otherwise have been asked.



**General Outputs for Sunnyside**

Output	Weekly number	As % of GI average
Reference questions	846	.84
Total circulation	3,286	.33
Fiction circulation	313	.15
Hold requests	205	.16
In-library use of materials	333	.19
On-site programs	14	.84
On-site program attendance	215	.95
Website user sessions	382	.52



While it is not necessary to compare data between libraries, sometimes doing so reveals ways in which one library might be notably different from its peers. Of course, caution should be exercised in making such comparisons; but, one of the goals of this project was to demonstrate the viability of multiple libraries conducting comparable data on library service outputs and perceived user outcomes. (See the General Outputs for Sunnyside slide at left.)

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Alternatively, rather than compare an individual library to the norm for a larger group of libraries, local library managers might find it equally revealing to analyze a library's own data from year to year.

Indeed, making presentations such as the one illustrated here may be the most productive use of Counting on Results data. Making a data-based presentation requires that the presenter examine and analyze the data in advance. The content of such a presentation may raise and answer some questions. In all likelihood, however, the discussion provoked by the presentation will raise other important questions and generate additional insights into the data not realized previously. As a result of such discussion, library staff, patrons, and/or decision-makers might be inspired to engage in an ongoing dialog that not only helps to shape future data collection efforts but also to inform decisions that shape the library's future.

For example, a major set of findings for Sunnyside Regional Library is that, while patrons were frequently observed consulting service desk staff and online computer resources, they spent less time using the library as a quiet place to read and write. (See the General Activities for Sunnyside slide at right.) Why is that the case? Does the library have insufficient space to provide a haven for readers? Is the space adequate, but improperly furnished or lit? Is it too close to a noisier area? If any of these reasons explain the difference, library decision-makers may want to consider re-assigning or modifying existing space, adding space, or building new space. On the other hand, are these differences in observed user behavior not attributable to library conditions, but rather to the demographics and lifestyles of patrons? For most participating libraries, there were distinctive usage patterns related to gender, age, and education. Perhaps Sunnyside patrons are less likely to read and study at the library because they are more likely to be working adults who have completed their schooling and do their reading elsewhere.

Observed Activity	SRL	Total
Using a computer	33%	22%
At service desk	30%	12%
In stacks	16%	22%
Reading/writing	10%	16%
Attending event	5%	15%
<i>Interacting with others</i>	5%	6%

# Counting on Results

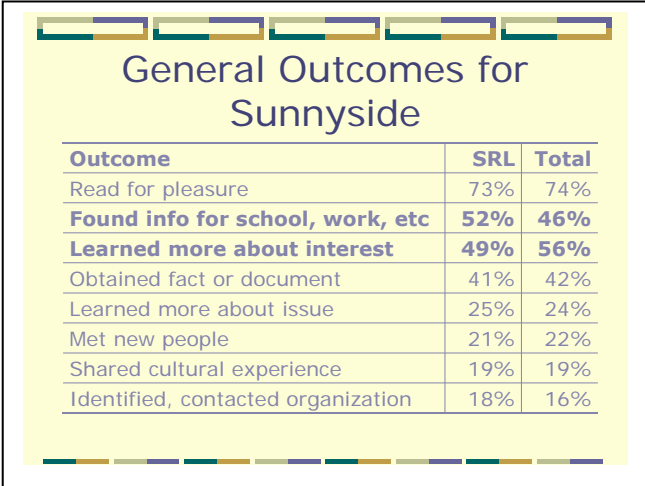
## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Another option for utilizing this type of presentation is as a point of departure for focus group interviews. Participants might be introduced to topics they will then be asked to discuss.

For instance, one of the most interesting findings for Sunnyside Regional Library (indeed, all participating libraries) is a potentially gender-biased self-perception about the outcome of library services. Women tend to report reading for pleasure, while men tend to report seeking information about a personal interest or social issue. Is this difference a real one, or does it stem entirely from internalized gender bias? To investigate these questions, the library might conduct separate focus group interviews of men and women. The goal of such interviews would be to identify very specific activities and outcomes in order to determine if this difference is real. The answer to this question could have substantial ramifications for the library's collection development policy, public relations efforts, and readers' advisory services.

Finally, as illustrated in the accompanying sample presentation, it is important to combine qualitative input with quantitative data. Respondents to user outcome surveys were asked not only to provide quick replies to structured response questions but also to report, in their own words, "success stories" from their own experiences as library patrons. These stories help to bring the statistics to life. Whenever statistics are utilized in a presentation, it is important to enliven them in this way.

For example, 33 percent of Sunnyside patrons were observed using computers, compared with only 22 percent for all General Information libraries. Likewise, 30 percent of Sunnyside patrons were witnessed at service desks, compared with only 12 percent for all GI libraries. One success story illustrated these data particularly well: "Got a great job. Info obtained online through computer at my library. The employees at Sunnyside branch are always very knowledgeable and friendly. They should get recognition for their superior job."



Outcome	SRL	Total
Read for pleasure	73%	74%
<b>Found info for school, work, etc</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Learned more about interest</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>56%</b>
Obtained fact or document	41%	42%
Learned more about issue	25%	24%
Met new people	21%	22%
Shared cultural experience	19%	19%
Identified, contacted organization	18%	16%

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Fifty-two percent of Sunnyside patrons reported finding information they needed for school, work, or a community group, while only 46 percent of patrons for all General Information libraries reported that outcome. (See the slide for General Outcomes for Sunnyside.)

Respondents who indicated that outcome reported specific success stories, including:

- "I got an A++ on my report."
- "Returned to college at 47 ... and made the Dean's list."

While this example presents data for Sunnyside Regional Library, the findings indicated are typical of CoR respondents. In many cases, however, individual library results differ dramatically from the norms for a particular service response. When developing such a presentation, it is wise to watch for these anomalies, to report them, and to ask questions about what might explain them. For the complete Microsoft PowerPoint sample presentation, see Appendix L.

## Recommendations for Collecting Useful Data

The foregoing example was designed to illustrate how to analyze an individual library's CoR data from a comparative perspective. On the basis of this project, several specific recommendations for collecting and using such output and outcome data effectively are offered.

### Create Local Data for Local Needs

Design local data collection efforts around local library needs. Although state and federal agencies survey public libraries annually for certain basic statistics used to assess their status and performance, library managers and decision-makers are largely free to determine the scope and extent of their data collection efforts.

For most public libraries, the data collected represent an accumulation of items over years or even decades. An annual review of data collected is highly recommended. Such a review offers a regular opportunity to re-assess the burdens and payoffs of local statistics, to improve the quality of data that are part of the library's time series, to drop statistics that are no longer needed or useful, and to add new statistics called for by emerging or foreseeable needs.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Line staff upon whom the greatest data collection burden falls should be included in this review. It is important for local decision-makers to take responsibility for this essential component of successful library management, and not to allow matters to drift to the point that data collected at great effort are no longer relevant to decision-making.

### Build a Statistical History for the Library

Maintain a time-series of key statistics for the library, so that changes over time can be monitored adequately. A major goal of the Counting on Results (CoR) project was to develop standardized output and outcome measures for selected—and, in some cases, modified—Planning for Results (PfR) service responses (SRs).

While comparative statistics are often valuable, local library managers can learn much from a careful analysis of their own library's data over time. From time to time, modifications to data items collected for many years are required; but, such changes should be made carefully, preserving to the fullest extent possible the library's time series.

### Customize Output Statistics to Local Needs

Collect customized output data, selecting particular output measures that are of value to the local library's operation. Collect these statistics at the level of detail needed to inform local decision-making. The CoR project has attempted to model this highly desirable practice.

Few library managers feel that they have the time to give lavish attention to customizing local data collection efforts. That is why the authors believed it would be helpful to develop some standardized equivalents of such customized data elements. The hope is that the products of this project will not only save time for local decision-makers, but facilitate the development of more precisely defined peer groups with whom to make statistical comparisons.

### Collect Outcome Data Regularly

Determine the types of outcome data required to inform library decision-making and establish a regular schedule for collecting it. Patrons are rarely surveyed about the outcomes of the services they receive from the public library. While calls for such data have

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

been issued steadily for state and federal agencies in recent years, there is little evidence that local library managers have embraced it.

Rare as it may be for outcome data to be collected at all, it is rarer still for it to be collected on any kind of regular schedule. Although much can be learned from focus group and key informant interviews, it is impossible to generalize from them to a library's entire clientele. A survey is, practically speaking, the most effective mechanism for obtaining outcome data for large numbers of patrons. At least annually, it is recommended that such a survey be collected for every public library.

### Incorporate User Demographics Into Local Data Collection

When useful and to the extent possible, collect data on demographic characteristics of patrons in association with output and outcome data. While it is useful to examine regularly the general trends for library outputs and user-reported outcomes, the overall data can be deceptive.

Library patrons are an increasingly diverse group. Gender, age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, family status, and work status exert powerful influences on the ways in which individuals use their library and the outcomes that result. Sometimes these influences and their consequences are obvious, but, as the analysis of data from this study has shown, at other times, those influences and consequences are unexpected.

Treating all patrons identically does not always ensure that they have equal opportunities to benefit from library services. Sometimes, having demographic details as part of the library's outcome and output data allows local managers to improve services to specific subsets of their clientele.

The latest U.S. Census data for small units of geography (e.g., counties, cities, Census tracts, block groups) and the accompanying data management tools will make accessing and utilizing such data easier than it has ever been.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Use Planning for Results Service Responses ... or Do It Yourself

Utilize Planning for Results (PFR) service responses or develop your own. For at least three decades, the Public Library Association has sought to assist decision-makers for the nation's public libraries in clarifying their varied missions, allocating resources in pursuit of multiple goals, and evaluating their performance. Like Planning and Role-Setting for Public Libraries (PRSPL), the PFR model offers several pre-packaged service responses (the parallel to PRSPL roles) from which one may choose for a library.

While much well-informed thought and substantial amounts of managerial experience are represented by those options, the PFR model does not attempt to limit a library to that set of choices. The management of a particular library may believe that local needs justify modifying the SRs in any of a variety of ways: narrowing their focus, expanding it by combining elements from two or more, or inventing entirely new SRs that better fit the library's situation. The PFR manual explicitly advocates certain types of modifications, such as focusing on a chosen SR for a particular client group (e.g., Basic Literacy or Formal Education Support services to children).

### Identify Peers & Collect Comparable Data

Identify peer libraries and work with them to collect needed comparative data. Local data, including time series data, are most valuable for local decision-making and generally less subject to some of the data quality concerns discussed in this report. Still, comparative data are also valuable, as they sometimes shed light on local statistics that would otherwise be lacking.

A library may have a long history of providing a particular service at what might be regarded locally as a modest, but acceptable, level. It might take comparing this library's statistics on the service in question with those of peers providing the same service to realize that "modest" performance might actually be deficient in some way that requires attention.

Good managers should interpret statistics for their libraries with the perspective lent by both a strong time series of local data and high-quality comparative statistics. Both PLA and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provide national public library statistics annually, but these sources alone are not likely to serve local decision-making

# **Counting on Results**

## **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

adequately. With colleagues in peer libraries, local managers should take responsibility for creating the output and outcome data they need to serve their patrons as well as possible.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### 7 Conclusion

This report closes with the results of the project evaluation followed by recommendations for:

- revising the products (i.e., Palm hardware and software, user outcome survey questionnaires),
- ensuring success in future data collection projects of this scale, and
- pursuing future research and development related to outcome-based evaluation.

### Project Evaluation

In mid-August 2001, a project evaluation survey of Counting on Results (CoR) participants was conducted. Of the 45 libraries that participated fully in the project, 35 (78 percent) responded to this survey. (See Appendix M.) The survey asked questions about difficulties experienced with data collection instruments (Palm hardware and software, postcard and Web outcome surveys), utility of data reports provided, likelihood that the library would continue such data collection, helpfulness of project personnel, and willingness of the library to participate

### Most Frequently Reported Difficulties

Respondents were asked to identify any difficulties experienced with either the Palm-based collection of output data by library staff or the postcard/Web outcome surveys completed by library users.

In descending order, the most frequently reported difficulties with the Palm-based collection of output data were:

- using the Palm Operating System (9 or 26%),
- uploading data from the Palm organizer to a local computer (8 or 24%),
- collecting observed activities data using the Palm organizer (8 or 24%),
- collecting recorded output data using the Palm organizer (7 or 21%),
- installing the CoR Palm software on a local computer (6 or 18%), and
- transmitting data files to GeoMarketing International, the Palm consultants (3 or 9%).

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

In descending order, the most frequently reported difficulties with the user outcome surveys were:

- issues related to distributing, collecting, or returning the postcard surveys (5 or 15%),
- running out of postcard surveys (3 or 9%),
- user difficulties navigating the Web versions of the surveys (2 or 6%), and
- problems linking to the Web surveys or submitting completed responses via the Web (1 or 3%).

## Usefulness of Data Reports

The success of a project such as Counting on Results depends entirely upon the usefulness of the resulting data. For that reason, participating libraries that submitted at least 10 output data reports or at least 10 completed user outcome surveys received interim data reports. Their comments on these reports were solicited. In the evaluation survey, CoR participants were also asked to assess the usefulness of the data reports based on these interim data reports. Of the 27 libraries that submitted enough output data via Palm organizers to receive interim data reports, 17 or 67 percent assessed the report as “very useful” or “somewhat useful. Of the 23 libraries that submitted enough user outcome surveys to receive interim data reports, 14 or 61 percent assessed the report as “very useful” or “somewhat useful.”

## Likelihood of Continued Data Collection

The value of such data collection also depends largely on a sustained effort by libraries. For this reason, CoR participants were asked how likely it is that they will continue to collect output or outcome data in these or similar ways. Fourteen out of 19 respondents (74 percent) thought it very or somewhat likely that their libraries would continue Palm-based collection of output data. Nineteen out of 26 respondents (73 percent) thought it very or somewhat likely that they would continue to conduct user outcome surveys. While these findings seem at first to contradict the opinions expressed about the value of interim data reports, they are, in fact, consistent with the numbers and proportions of respondents who found the data reports “very useful.”

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Helpfulness of Project Personnel

Another key factor in the success of such a project is the helpfulness of the personnel involved—their timeliness, courtesy, knowledge, and effectiveness. Based on these criteria, CoR participants were asked to evaluate the helpfulness of project staff and consultants. Both the Library Research Service staff and the GeoMarketing International consultants were highly rated on helpfulness with 100 percent of responding participants assessing the organizations and individuals as “very helpful.”

### Likelihood of Participation in Similar Projects

Finally, CoR participants were asked, if they had the decision to make over again, how likely it is that they would decide to participate in this type of project. Of those who had decided, an overwhelming 93 percent of respondents (27 out of 29) said it was “very” or “somewhat likely” that they would choose to participate in user outcome surveys in the future. An impressive 82 percent (23 out of 28)—a somewhat smaller proportion, but still a sizeable majority--said it was “very” or “somewhat likely” that they would choose to participate in Palm-based collection of output data again. These strong expressions of willingness to experiment with such new and labor-intensive types of data collection are testimony to the strongly felt need for such measures of library effectiveness.

## Recommendations for Revised Products

Based on the experience of this project, several recommendations can be made for the future development and application of Palm software and hardware as well as user outcome surveys.

### Palm Software Recommendations

A successor product to this project’s Palm software should be designed to more explicitly draw the distinction between real-time data collection and post facto data aggregation. Palm technology was chosen for this project because of its ability to facilitate collecting data on observed user activities (e.g., using a computer, reading or writing, at a service desk). Indeed, this type of output data was the only type involved in this project that called for live data collection. It was expected that data on recorded output measures would be collected elsewhere, either automatically (e.g., Web site usage) or manually (e.g., on-site program

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

attendance). Data from such other tallies was then to be entered into the Palm PDA to facilitate its transmission via the Internet, eliminating the need for participating libraries to transmit data by other means (e.g., e-mail attachments, diskettes sent via surface mail or courier).

In practice, this dual use of the Palm PDA for posting different but closely related types of data confused many participants. Recorded output measures for all service responses included web usage statistics, and an observed user activity was “at a computer.” Library patrons at computers were supposed to be counted during the morning, afternoon, and evening “sweeps” of the library during which data on observed user activities were collected. Web usage statistics were to have included counts of user sessions, page views, or file downloads for longer, more continuous periods—usually an entire month. Some local data collectors were confused about these two data types and either reported observed activities as recorded outputs (e.g., at a computer as a user session) or reported recorded outputs (e.g., user sessions) for very small intervals of time (e.g., a single day).

Future Palm-based software should focus exclusively on helping library staff to collect real-time data on observed user activities. Post facto data, like recorded output measures, can be reported easily enough using either a conventional spreadsheet or a Web form on a desktop computer. The distinction between the two data types would be clearer to future data collectors if different equipment was utilized in reporting them. Both types of data could still be transmitted over the Internet.

If a future project pursues collecting data on observed patron activities, “attending event” should be removed as an option, and data collectors should be instructed not to observe patron activities during library programs or other events. Because events happen at discrete times and for finite periods, they are not comparable to patron behaviors that can be observed on an ongoing basis in most libraries (e.g., patrons at a service desk, using a computer, or in the stacks).

Another recommendation related to observed patron activities is to simplify, if not eliminate, collecting the location of the activity. For this project, location data was collected in some detail. The results by location do not justify collecting data in this level of detail. The principal reason for including a location variable is to help isolate one service response (SR)

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

from another, when more than one is under study at a time. Apart from that, it does not appear that there is enough potential utility to justify the effort.

If a future project pursues collecting recorded output statistics by SR, it is recommended that those statistics be limited to a small number that all libraries studying that SR agree to collect. For this project, local library managers were encouraged to pick and choose which of their SR's recorded output statistics they would report. Indeed, as part of the software's setup, it was designed to enable them to customize the software to their own list of chosen statistics. In practice, with small numbers of libraries selecting some SRs, this leniency resulted in a "Swiss cheese" of data for some SRs that is of marginal utility.

An intended product of this project was a downloadable Palm software package that could be downloaded as freeware from the project Web site. Because developing the Counting on Results (CoR) Palm software required use of Pendragon Forms, a licensed software product, that was not possible. If such software is to become a viable library management product, it is likely necessary that it be produced as commercial software. That status would not only address the issue of software licensing but also concerns about the availability and reliability of ongoing technical support and data processing services. The 3M Library Corporation is the only library vendor known to have a product on the market currently that employs the Palm Operating System, although the product does not utilize off-the-shelf Palm PDAs. In all likelihood, other library vendors will, in time, move into this burgeoning corner of the computer hardware and software marketplace.

## Palm Hardware Recommendations

The next generation of Palm software for collecting library data should also be designed to incorporate use of barcodes and a scanner attachment to basic Palm hardware.

Unfortunately, the cost of incorporating these technologies into this project proved prohibitive; but, their potential value as components of this data collection strategy are indisputable. If a Palm PDA is equipped with a scanner and barcode-reading software, it could be utilized not just to count numbers of items—equipment as well as materials—but also to count books and other cataloged materials by Dewey or Library of Congress classification. The level of detail added to a library's data by such technology would facilitate greatly relating library usage statistics to specific service responses.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### User Outcome Survey Recommendations

When the Counting on Results project was proposed, it was assumed that user outcome surveys would be conducted via the World Wide Web. During key informant interviews of staff representing volunteer libraries, a problematic reality asserted itself. The almost universal response to the suggestion that links to online user outcome surveys be added to local library Web sites was negative. Staff at most volunteer libraries described similar circumstances: insufficient numbers of public access computers, lines of patrons waiting their turns to use those computers, and, as a result, the fear of staff rebellion, patron outrage, and public relations problems at the suggestion that public libraries could afford the luxury of encouraging patrons to complete user outcome surveys on library computers.

At the suggestion of key informants, it was decided to offer the user outcome surveys in a postage-paid, large postcard format. This format was reasonably successful, as over 5,000 completed postcards were returned. Interestingly, while some actually returned individually via the pre-paid postal permit on the back, as many returned boxed up together, having been collected and mailed by local library staff. The key informants were correct about the Web survey strategy. Only about 500 responses were obtained via the Web counterparts of the postcard questionnaires.

In future projects of this sort, the question should be asked about how to administer user outcome surveys most effectively. This project began with a faulty assumption, but stumbled onto what appears to have been a fairly successful option: the large format postcard. Because many of the postcards returned in bunches, it may also be that a simple paper questionnaire would suffice. Perhaps using multiple formats is the way to go.

Other options that might be considered include: scannable paper forms, telephone surveys, and a relatively new option: dedicated survey boxes that would make it possible for respondents to enter data directly without monopolizing high-powered computers loaded with online resources. It will also be interesting to learn if the unexpected resistance to Web surveys abates over time, as public libraries acquire more computers and faster connection speeds. Hopefully, it will, as the Web option invites easier responses from remote users ("virtual visitors") and visitors who are in a hurry to leave the library but willing to respond later.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Based on the responses received to the six user outcome surveys, it is recommended that the following outcomes be dropped, due to their receiving little or no response:

- From Basic Literacy, drop the two GED testing items (i.e., prepared for or passed GED tests). The only exception to this recommendation would be if the library interested in collecting Basic Literacy outcomes offered programs and services specifically aimed at this end.
- From Business and Career Information, drop the outcome of closing a business. Perhaps the timing of this study was fortuitous, but reports of business closures aided by libraries were non-existent. (As one wag put it, it does not require a lot of information to know when one needs to go out of business.)
- From Library as a Place (Commons), drop the items about use of a library café and a library-sponsored chat room. Again, this recommendation applies to all libraries, except those that might be making specific efforts of this sort.
- From Information Literacy, drop the outcome “created a Web site.” An exception to this recommendation might be made if the library studying this service response (SR) offers programs and services specifically designed to encourage Web site creation by patrons. That does not appear to have been the case for any libraries that participated in this project.
- From Local History and Genealogy, drop the outcome concerning learning about one’s family medical history. This outcome was very seldom reported, most likely because most public libraries—even those with substantial genealogy departments—do not have records that would assist a genealogy enthusiast in gathering this type of personal information.

## Recommendations for Successful Data Collection

Based on the experience of this project, many recommendations for ensuring the success of future data collection efforts of this type may be made.

### Understand the Limits of PfR Service Responses

Participants should understand the limitations involved in collecting data specific to a particular library role or service response. The Planning for Results (PfR) service responses are not mutually exclusive; indeed, there are substantial overlaps between many of them. This circumstance can make it very difficult to isolate a particular service response to the

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

extent that might be wished. For instance, during preliminary key informant interviews for this project, it was learned that even librarians themselves have difficulty distinguishing between some service responses (e.g., Commons and Community Referral; Current Topics and Titles, General Information, and Lifelong Learning). When observing user activities in the library, there are tradeoffs to be made between patron privacy and data precision.

For example, activities librarians wanted to observe included browsing and licensed database usage; but, on reflection and after some testing, it was decided that all one could observe without intrusion were patrons in the stacks and at computers. When such limitations are imposed upon the data that can be collected, decision-makers must decide whether the less precise data is worth the staff time and effort to collect.

Finally, the set of factors that affects most whether or not data on a specific service response can be collected is logistics--the staffing and layout of the library facility. Data about the Business and Career or Local History and Genealogy service response can only be collected readily when these services are confined to a specific space within the facility and delivered by staff whose time is dedicated to those services. For some SRs, there is very little likelihood of designated staff or space. While not entirely unheard-of, it is unusual for public libraries to assign specific, organized sets of resources to several of the SRs: Basic Literacy, Commons, and Information Literacy, for example.

If Basic Literacy was more narrowly defined, the adult literacy efforts of many urban public libraries might provide some of the necessary boundaries for measurement. As it is, though, Basic Literacy includes both adult literacy and services to preschoolers who are learning their letters, numbers, and colors.

The Commons SR (a.k.a. Library as a Place) might involve activities that take place in the library's reading rooms as well as its meeting rooms. Unfortunately, activities associated with many other SRs occur in those same locations.

Much the same problem exists for Information Literacy, which presumably takes place as much in the area housing the library's traditional reference collection as in its computer area. (And how are Information Literacy activities to be tracked when computer terminals are scattered throughout the library?) For these reasons, it is little surprise that the most

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

popular Counting on Results service response was the least specific: General Information (Incorporating Current Topics and Titles and Lifelong Learning).

### Organize a Small Group of Libraries with a Focus

Projects should be organized around smaller groups of libraries addressing comparable, more focused issues. Of necessity, this pilot project cast a very broad net, soliciting volunteer libraries from across the nation that were willing to make the sacrifices required to participate. The researchers were in no position to be choosy about the number or specific interests of the libraries that were volunteered. In reality, however, such data collection efforts would be much easier to manage and would yield more comparable and relevant results if the libraries involved were fewer in number and more alike in their interests—say, in a given service response, or, perhaps, even a particular aspect of a service response.

Genealogy, for instance, seems to be the greater half of the Local History and Genealogy SR. Libraries that operate full-service genealogy departments probably have more in common with each other than libraries sharing any other SR. A group of public library genealogy departments might decide to pursue a project similar to this one, but focusing more precisely on their services to a particular racial, ethnic, national, or religious group (e.g., African-Americans, Hispanics, Irish, or Jewish); a type of programming (e.g., an introduction to genealogy for beginners, teaching users how to search genealogy Web sites); or a special service (e.g., providing selective dissemination of information services, designing user guides).

### Visit Local Sites

Project staff should make early site visits to assess local circumstances and to meet with local library managers as well as data collectors. During the earliest stages of this project, staff conducted key informant interviews via telephone and e-mail to obtain background information on participating libraries. While this approach was not entirely ineffective, more and better information would have been obtained via site visits. The opportunity afforded by such visits to meet face-to-face with local library managers and, even more importantly, the individuals who will actually be collecting the data would be invaluable both to the managers of such a project and to those involved on-site. One of the greatest challenges in

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

pursuing this type of project is fitting it into the day-to-day business of running a busy public library. The motivation to initiate as well as maintain the necessary level of effort will be much greater if project staff and local staff actually meet. Alas, the time and money costs associated with this activity are widely regarded as suspect by many funders and, consequently, proposal writers.

### Train Data Collectors

Data collectors should receive face-to-face, hands-on training that addresses the concepts as well as the technology involved. For the training and support of data collectors, the Counting on Results (CoR) project relied exclusively on an instruction manual and technical assistance via telephone and e-mail. Both of these mechanisms are essential to this type of effort, but, the experience of this project demonstrates all too well, they are no substitute for face-to-face, hands-on training.

Substantial minorities of participants experienced significant difficulties in utilizing Palm technology. Most unfortunately, this project turned out to be the first introduction to Palm technology for some. These individuals, who lacked the most basic familiarity with the Palm platform, had to overcome much greater psychological and technological obstacles to participate fully in this project. A few, alas, could not overcome them.

If prospective data collectors had been assembled in a two-day training conference during the project's first year, these Palm "initiates"—and others who had much smaller barriers to overcome—would have had the opportunity to learn, to be tutored, and to practice with immediate feedback and support. Doubtless, both the quantity and the quality of such a project's data would be improved dramatically by the availability of such training.

### Standardize Data Collection Schedules

Data collection schedules should be standardized. Due to the exploratory nature of the project, the number of libraries involved, and the variety of service responses under study, extreme leniency in the scheduling of local data collection activities was deemed a necessity. In retrospect, project staff believe that this leniency actually made it more difficult, rather than easier, for local participants.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

In all likelihood, the level of participation for every site would have been higher if the data collection “window” had been shorter than six months and if project staff had been more persistent. Indeed, it seems likely that, in such circumstances, even higher minimum levels of participation might have been set and met.

For this project, variations in observed activities among libraries pursuing the same service response (SR) were extreme. The extremity of the variations can probably be attributed to multiple factors, including potential deficiencies in intercoder reliability, the timing and frequency of observations, and real differences in community demographics and local library services.

One of the strongest arguments for providing on-site, face-to-face training to prospective data collectors is to ensure intercoder reliability. While every effort was made to make the activities to be observed as distinct as possible, the simple fact that observations were being made by so many different people working under different circumstances raises concerns about the reliability of their observations. To what extent would all coders be likely to categorize a particular observed reality as the same activity? A library patron might have been observed interacting with other patrons near a service desk. How would different coders have recorded that: as interacting with others or as being at a service desk? It is easy to imagine circumstances in which coders might have logged the same activity differently. One observer might give a cursory glance at a patron and log the activity as using a computer, but another might look closely enough to notice that the patron is simply using the chair in front of a computer, but actually reading a book or magazine. The only way to guard against such difficulties is to train observers, give them opportunities to practice, and evaluate their performance.

## Determine a Basis for Comparison

Of necessity, types of data collected in this project required a focus on the outlet rather than the administrative level. While it did not prove particularly difficult to collect data on most library outputs and user activities, making sense of those data once obtained was another matter. When library administrative entities or jurisdictions are examined in relation to each other, comparisons are often facilitated by presenting the data in per capita ratios. Such ratios are made possible by the existence for each public library jurisdiction of a particular statistic: the population for its legal service area.

## Counting on Results

### New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

For most U.S. public libraries, there is no counterpart to this statistic at the outlet level. While it is a truism that library users tend to come from the immediate vicinity of the facility (e.g., a five mile radius), few jurisdictions have assigned specific sub-units of their legal service areas to individual outlets. This is unlikely to happen in many jurisdictions, because outlets function not so much as miniature central libraries or branches for their specific environs but more as “magnet” facilities. In many larger jurisdictions, individual outlets have staff, collections, programs, and/or services that are specialized, and, as a result, such outlets may be visited by patrons from throughout the larger jurisdiction.

So, what is to be done in the absence of such a population figure to be utilized as the divisor in a per capita calculation? The option utilized in this study may be the easiest one. For recorded output measures, such as circulation and reference questions, per visitor statistics were calculated utilizing the reported number of library visits. Certainly for large scale projects involving libraries from many jurisdictions and, perhaps, many states, this may be the only practical option. That being the case, it will be important to urge all participating libraries to report library visits. (This statistic is missing for some CoR participants.) For a data collection project focused on a single jurisdiction, one might assign Census tracts or block groups to outlets, but this strategy is fraught with hazards. Boundaries of Census geography frequently do not coincide with desired library service areas and, at best, assignments of geography on such a basis would be arbitrary.

Considering community demographics might also help to create more readily comparable peer groups of libraries. Many libraries serve similar size populations, but their demographic profiles are quite different (e.g., diverse central cities v. homogenous suburban counties). The imminent release of 2000 U.S. Census data for small units of geography (e.g., counties, cities, Census tracts, block groups) and the data management tools that accompany that data will make this heretofore very difficult task a great deal easier.

### Extend Strong Support to Sites

Project staff should extend more frequent, regular, and pro-active support to local participants. The permissiveness of the data collection period for this project made it unnecessarily difficult for project staff and consultants to monitor local activities at such a

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

large number of sites. Coordinators of future efforts might consider offering a list of 25 randomly selected dates at the outset of a project, asking local site representatives to select 10 of them, and then acting on this information—contacting local representatives in advance of, on, and after each of their chosen dates. Such contacts would make it easier to evaluate participation rates throughout a wider overall data collection period. Project staff would thus be alerted when staff at a particular site simply forget to collect data, fall behind on their own schedule, or experience unusual difficulties that require timely technical assistance.

### Provide Training & Technical Assistance for Data Use

Provision should be made for training and ongoing technical assistance to participants to maximize their successful use of resulting data. While collecting library output and user outcome data for specific PfR service responses is a tall order all by itself, it is not a sufficient end. There is no point in collecting data unless it is going to be utilized.

A handicap of many such projects is the failure or inability of project staff as well as local participants to follow through from collecting data to using it. This is a danger that should be of great concern to all involved, because it undermines the value of the effort completely. While it is difficult for most grantees and contractors to guarantee certain levels of ongoing support after a project has concluded, both they and funders of such projects should feel under some obligation to address this issue. In addition to expert support, the usefulness of such data often depends upon the level of training in data use that exists at the local level.

It is not unusual for project staff and local data users to mistake the mere tabulation of data for analysis. The relevance, meaning, and implications of a table of numbers are not apparent to many. Ideally, a project such as this one should conclude with—or at least be succeeded by—a mini-conference to which participants bring their local data, receive training in how to analyze and present data, and practice doing so with their colleagues.

If the travel-related costs involved in such an event cannot be included in the grant funding the next such project, those proposing the project might want to consider alternative, possibly even pre-existing venues (e.g., regional workshops; sessions at state and national conferences) for achieving this sort of closure to whatever extent possible. If project staff

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

or consultants are not in a position to provide ongoing technical assistance, local participants should be referred to whatever resources might be available to them to obtain such support (e.g., the nearest library school, a regional library cooperative, a state library agency).

These foregoing recommendations apply generally, but are addressed specifically to the Upper Hudson Library System, based in Albany, New York. Public libraries in that system are the first in the nation beyond the CoR project participants to utilize the new tools developed by this project.

## Recommendations for Research & Development

The findings of this research recommend further study to confirm empirically a more market-based conception of library roles or service responses. The two latest planning models endorsed by the Public Library Association—Planning and Role-Setting for Public Libraries (PRSPL) and Planning for Results (PfR)—have promulgated roles and service responses, respectively, that were based entirely on the perspectives of the authors and representatives of the modest numbers of libraries involved in developing those models. Neither the PRSPL roles nor the PfR service responses are research-based taxonomies. Both were developed—intentionally—from a library management perspective. An examination of a substantial data set—including library-reported outputs, user-reported outcomes, and community demographics soon to be available from the 2000 U.S. Census—might reveal a more useful, more reality-based perspective on some of the choices facing library planners and managers. For instance, a statistical analysis of the interactions among outputs, outcomes, and demographics might recommend simplifying the PfR service response set.

The authors speculate that such an investigation would likely produce evidence to justify reorganizing the PfR service responses (SRs) into two tiers. Considering the overlapping responses received from users via outcome surveys, it seems likely that some of the SRs might be umbrellas under which others can be subsumed. For instance, this study was unable to separate entirely from each other three service responses: Current Topics and Titles, General Information, and Lifelong Learning. General Information was used in this project as the umbrella term. Neither library staff who were interviewed nor users who responded to the outcome survey drew dramatic lines between these service responses. It was also clear from both library staff and patrons that most regard Basic Literacy, Formal

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Education Support , and Information Literacy as subsidiary aspects of Lifelong Learning. Many also had difficulties separating Commons and Community Referral, and some indicated that Cultural Awareness is closely related to those two SRs.

The possible inter-relationships that might be revealed go on and on. Where does one draw the line between:

- Basic Literacy and Information Literacy?
- Business and Career Information and Consumer Information?
- Current Topics and Titles and Formal Education Support?
- Local History and Genealogy, Community Referral, and Cultural Awareness?

Surely, if there is value in promulgating sets of choices, such as the PRSPL roles and the PfR service responses, it is worth conceiving those choices on the basis of empirical research as well as input from and about the community in general and library users in particular.

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

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# **Counting on Results**

## **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

### **Appendices**

- A. Volunteer Confirmation Survey
- B. Counting on Results (CoR) Advisory Committee
- C. CoR Participants by State and City
- D. CoR Participants by Service Response
- E. Contact Information for CoR Participants
- F. Key Informant Interview Summaries
- G. CoR User Outcome Surveys
- H. Final Recorded Library Output Data
- I. Final Observed Patron Activities Data
- J. Final User Outcome Data
- K. Success Stories by CoR Service Response
- L. Sample Presentation: What Can Numbers Tell Us?
- M. CoR Evaluation Survey

## **Counting on Results**

### **New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries**

## **Attachments**

1. CoR Software (CD-ROM)
2. CoR Instruction Manual
3. Conference Presentation on CoR Project: New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries
4. Library Output Reports by Library, Service Response, and Location
5. User Outcome Reports by Library and User Demographic Group

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### Index

#### A

Adults .....2, 6, 24, 33, 41, 71, 78, 79, 98  
Age...viii, 6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 23, 24, 35, 43,  
44, 45, 46, 63, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73,  
74, 77, 78, 79, 80, 84, 88  
Albany, NY.....36, 37, 39, 104  
Altoona, PA.....37, 38, 59  
At service desk.....  
31, 33, 34, 36, 42, 43, 46, 47, 85  
Attending event.....  
..vii, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42,  
44, 46, 94

#### B

Basic Literacy.....  
....vi, viii, 5, 21, 22, 32, 33, 34, 41, 49,  
50, 58, 65, 67, 68, 69, 74, 79, 80, 89,  
97, 98, 104, 105  
Birmingham, AL..... 34, 39  
Boulder, CO ..... 39, 40, 62, 63  
Bozeman, MT .....59  
Bremerton, WA..... 38, 60  
Buda, TX .....39  
Business.viii, 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 15, 20, 21, 24,  
51, 53, 64, 65, 66, 69, 70, 79, 97, 100  
Business and Career....vii, 21, 34, 39, 51,  
58, 65, 69, 74, 97, 98, 105

#### C

Careers .. 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 24, 51,  
69, 70, 75, 79  
Circulation.....  
.....vi, 1, 3, 11, 24, 26, 28, 30, 52, 102

College degrees.....  
8, 64, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 86  
Commons ...vii, viii, 9, 21, 22, 32, 36, 37,  
39, 41, 42, 52, 58, 66, 70, 75, 79, 80,  
97, 98, 105  
Community groups..viii, 5, 54, 60, 67, 68,  
71, 79, 86  
Community Referral ....10, 21, 22, 54, 55,  
98, 105  
Community resources, services..iii, viii, 1,  
2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 47, 50,  
52, 54, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 70,  
71, 75, 79, 80, 82, 83, 86, 101, 102,  
104, 105  
Computers.....  
vii, 6, 8, 14, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 32, 35,  
36, 38, 40, 41, 44, 51, 56, 62, 64, 72,  
78, 80, 84, 85, 91, 93, 94, 95, 98, 101  
Consumer Information.....22, 54, 105  
CoR Instruction Manual.....19, 23, 100  
Council Bluffs, IA .....58  
Cultural Awareness.....22, 105  
Cultural heritage, events...viii, 1, 2, 9, 10,  
16, 54, 57, 60, 62, 63, 67, 68, 71, 73,  
76, 77, 78, 80  
Current Topics and Titles...10, 21, 54, 98,  
99, 104, 105

#### D

Data collection.....  
vi, ix, 1, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,  
28, 34, 46, 48, 82, 83, 84, 86, 87, 91,  
92, 93, 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Databases..... vii, 22, 98  
Demographics .... 8, 47, 84, 101, 102, 104  
Denver, CO ..... iv, 59  
Dickinson, ND.....35  
Digital divide.....32, 72, 78  
Directional questions ..... 29, 30

### **E**

Education . viii, 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 38, 50, 51,  
61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78,  
79, 84  
Erie, PA ..... 36, 37  
Evaluation survey ..... 91, 92

### **F**

Family history .....  
..14, 15, 16, 57, 58, 62, 63, 64, 68, 73,  
77, 78, 80  
Formal Learning Support..... 22, 54  
Fresno, CA ..... 38, 83, 84, 85, 86

### **G**

Gender .....viii, 63, 64, 65, 66, 84, 85  
Genealogy .. 1, 12, 15, 16, 33, 54, 57, 58,  
62, 63, 68, 73, 80, 97, 99  
General Information .... vii, 10, 11, 21, 22,  
24, 29, 30, 32, 34, 37, 38, 44, 52, 53,  
54, 59, 60, 65, 67, 68, 71, 75, 76, 79,  
80, 83, 85, 86, 98, 99, 104

Government Information.....22

### **H**

Historic preservation, renovation... 57, 62,  
63, 64, 77, 78  
Hobbies .....vii, 4, 11, 54, 60, 71, 72, 79  
Hurst, TX.....38

### **I**

Information Literacy ....vii, viii, 13, 21, 22,  
32, 39, 53, 55, 56, 61, 62, 66, 67, 72,  
76, 77, 79, 80, 97, 98, 105, 106, 107,  
108

In-library use ..... 2, 29, 30

Interacting with others.....  
.....24, 31, 36, 41, 44, 101

Interlibrary loan (ILL) .....16, 30, 98

### **J**

Jamaica, NY ..... 6, 60  
Jobs ....1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 21, 50,  
51, 65, 70, 74, 75, 79, 85

### **K**

Key informant interviews.... iii, 17, 20, 28,  
54, 88, 96, 98, 99

### **L**

LaFayette, GA..... 62

Lake City, FL ..... 34, 60

Learned about new books.....52, 64, 71

Legal, social, or political issues.....  
. 31, 51, 53, 54, 60, 67, 68, 85, 95, 103

Lewistown, MT..... 60

Librarian .....  
.... viii, 1, 16, 17, 24, 43, 55, 56, 61, 62

Library as a Place (Commons)... vii, viii, 9,  
36, 52, 58, 66, 70, 75, 79, 80, 97

Library catalog.....vii, 40, 55, 56

Library events .....  
..vii, viii, 16, 24, 31, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38,  
39, 41, 42, 44, 46, 79, 94

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

Library programs ... iii, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 23, 24, 29, 30, 33, 37, 41, 44, 58, 94, 97, 102

Library staff ..... iv, 8, 16, 21, 22, 27, 32, 56, 61, 62, 64, 72, 77, 79, 84, 91, 94, 96, 104

Library visits ..... 26, 29, 30, 102

Lifelong Learning .. 14, 21, 22, 29, 54, 98, 99, 104, 106

Local history ..... 1, 15, 16, 57, 62, 63, 68, 73, 79

Local History and Genealogy..... vii, 2, 15, 21, 33, 39, 41, 57, 62, 63, 73, 77, 79, 80, 97, 98, 99, 105

### **M**

Meeting new people ..... 16, 54, 60, 71, 72, 76, 79

Men ..... viii, 65, 66, 67, 68, 85

Mesa, AZ ..... 37, 38

Monessen, PA ..... 35

### **N**

Nazareth, PA ..... 39, 61, 62

### **O**

Observed activities..... 20, 24, 36, 38, 43, 46, 83, 91, 94, 101

Observed patron activities..... vii, 42, 94

Orlando, FL ..... 61, 62

Output Measures for Public Libraries 26, 47

Outputs . iii, iv, 1, 2, 3, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 102, 103

### **P**

Palm ..... iv, vi, ix, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 83, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 100

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) ..... 23, 26, 27, 94, 95

Planning and Role-Setting for Public Libraries ..... 89, 104

Planning for Results.... iii, iv, v, vi, 1, 2, 3, 17, 20, 22, 27, 83, 87, 89, 97, 104, 107

Portland, OR..... 38, 59, 60, 61

Public Library Association (PLA).. vi, 1, 18, 27, 83, 89, 104

### **Q**

Quiet place..... viii, 32, 52, 84

### **R**

Read for pleasure.. vii, viii, 52, 53, 59, 63, 64, 67, 76

Reading and writing..... 50, 69

Recommendations.... v, ix, 11, 19, 82, 86, 91, 93, 97, 104

Recorded library output ..... vi, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 83, 91, 93, 94, 95, 102

Reference books, services .... vi, 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 24, 26, 30, 32, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 64, 72, 78, 79, 98, 102

Reference services (facts and documents) ..... 60, 64, 67, 72

Reno, NV ..... 58

Riverside, CA..... 58

Round Rock, TX ..... 39, 40

# Counting on Results

## New Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of Public Libraries

### **S**

School... iv, viii, 2, 4, 6, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16,  
17, 42, 44, 51, 52, 54, 55, 57, 60, 63,  
64, 67, 68, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 78, 79,  
86, 104

Seniors.....73, 78, 80

Service Responses .. iv, vi, viii, 1, 3, 4, 13,  
15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 27, 29, 33, 64,  
66, 78, 83, 87, 89, 94, 95, 97, 100,  
103, 104, 105

Sioux City, IA ..... 29, 30, 31, 60

Success stories..... 6, 49, 85, 86

### **U**

User outcomes ..... 2, 12, 83

Using computers....vii, 31, 35, 38, 40, 42,  
45, 78, 85

### **V**

Viewing display..... 31, 42

Volunteer confirmation survey .....iv

### **W**

Web hits ..... 11, 13, 29, 30

Women..... 12, 65, 66, 67, 68, 80, 85

World Wide Web ....iv, vii, viii, ix, 3, 9, 12,  
16, 23, 24, 29, 30, 52, 53, 55, 56, 61,  
62, 64, 66, 67, 70, 72, 77, 79, 83, 91,  
92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 106

### **Y**

Younger adults (ages 25-39) ..... 69

Youth .....vii, 44, 45, 74, 77, 78