

## REPORT and RECOMMENDATIONS

Outreach Activities Working Group  
Susan Barnes and Keith Cogdill, co-chairs

### Review of OAWG Charge and Recommendations

In February, 2006 the National Network Office selected a group of outreach/education, consumer, and technology coordinators representing the eight regions of the NN/LM to consider issues related to the reporting of outreach activities. Susan Barnes, OERC, and Keith Cogdill, NNO, served as co-chairs. Karen Comer represented the NOMC and Cindy Olney, OERC consultant, served as an ex officio member.

This group, the Outreach Activities Working Group, was directed to address three issues and formulate recommendations for the Head, NNO by March 31, 2006:

1. The NOMC, working with the NOMC-TAC, NNO and AIR, has identified a set of recommended enhancements to the OARF and the mapping and reporting application. Which of these recommendations should be implemented by NOMC before April 30, 2006?
2. Should a new question about activity type be added to the OARF? If so, can some questions be “ghosted out” if they are not relevant to a particular type of activity?
3. In meetings with outreach and consumer health coordinators on March 9 and 14, OERC will review the follow-up survey of participants in activities that cover PubMed and MedlinePlus. Based on these meetings OERC will share preliminary recommendations about the future of the follow-up survey and other data that may be gathered to help the RMLs evaluate and improve their outreach programs. The Working Group will consider these recommendations and may offer suggestions.

The OAWG provided recommendations regarding many of the items in numbers 1 and 2, above. Recommendations regarding the remainder of number 1—with one exception (enhancement #11, see below)—and regarding number 3 were provided by the end of April, 2006. Complete information about recommendations for the enhancements in number 1 are available on the NN/LM StaffWiki at

[https://staff.nlm.gov/wiki/Outreach\\_Activities\\_Working\\_Group\\_%28OAWG%29](https://staff.nlm.gov/wiki/Outreach_Activities_Working_Group_%28OAWG%29). The OAWG recommended that a new question about activity type was not needed. The NNO accepted the group’s recommendations regarding these first two items on the list. Regarding the third item, the OERC recommended the discontinuation of the PubMed and MedlinePlus followup survey, and the OAWG supported that recommendation. Details regarding that recommendation are included with this report as Attachment 1 .

### Recommendations for further action

The Outreach Activities Working Group was also directed to consider the following six issues, offer preliminary suggestions, and prepare a plan for how their resolution might be accomplished early in the 2006-2011 contract period.

- Are there questions or response options that should be added to the OARF? Are there additional data that would inform the RMLs' evaluation of their outreach programs?
- Are there questions on the OARF that may be removed?
- Should Participant Information Sheets only be collected at specific activity types such as "class"?
- Data definitions are needed for all questions and response options included in OARF and the Participant Information Sheet.
- What guidance can be provided about the activities that should be recorded in the OARF system and the activities that should not be recorded? Previously, the guidance was that training on DOCLINE was considered a "basic Network program" activity and should not be reported as an outreach activity. There may also be a need for guidance about whether NLM or RML updates given at MLA chapter meetings or state health sciences library meetings should be considered outreach activities.
- Are there additional reports or analyses of the OARF data that would be helpful for the RMLs to have available in the NOMC's mapping/reporting system? For example, would it be helpful to have maps or reports of activity data grouped by activity type? Would it be helpful and feasible to group activity data by the title of a class, such as all "Super Searcher" classes? Would it be helpful for the RMLs to have maps or reports depicting data about the location of participants?

*In addition, recommended OARF enhancement #11 was moved to this list after the OAWG agreed that it is a good idea but failed to reach consensus regarding implementation:*

- OARF: Minority Populations. An "Other" check box will be added to OARF question 10b to allow users to indicate the participation of a minority population other than those currently listed on the form. A free text entry box will also be added to allow users to specify the "Other" minority population.

We recommend the following:

- A. Form a group in the next contract to continue work on these issues and questions we knew the OAWG wouldn't be able to resolve in its timeframe. This group would be composed of representatives from the Outreach/Education and Consumer Coordinator groups—people who conduct outreach and who use the OARF and mapping tools. This group should also have representation from all regions.
- B. In a related development the new online system for RML and project reports will be created early in the 2006-2011 contract. Work on this new system and additional development to the OARF should take place collaboratively so that the two systems are complementary and not duplicative. At the beginning of the 2006-2011 contract, the NNO might decide that a single group will consider issues related to outreach activity reporting along with the development of the new online project reporting system. In that case, the group's membership should include representatives from additional stakeholder groups, including Network Coordinators and Associate Directors. A disadvantage to having a single group work on both outreach activity reporting and the new online project reporting system would be that the group might be awkwardly large. If a separate group is named to work on the new online project reporting system, both groups should make concerted efforts to keep in close communication.

- C. Determine the relationship of the NOMC TAC to this, or these, groups. The TAC could be composed of technical coordinators primarily.
- D. Minimize the number of people who serve on more than one of these groups, except for staff from OERC, WebSTOC, NOMC, and NNO.

Telephone conference calls and email discussions regarding the above issues revealed diversity of opinion and perspective. Here are example comments related to the general purpose of the OARF system:

"If we know what purpose we are hoping to accomplish (what our goal is), then we will know the answers to questions 1, 2 4, and 5. If we were clear as to our goal/purpose, we'd know if questions should be added or dropped. We would also know what reports/analyses will be useful. We'd be able to get clear about what activities need OARFs. And the work for item 3 would be a bit easier, I'd think. Without a clear understanding of our purpose/goal, then we never know when we're "done" -- we could just go on and on, creating ways for people to input whatever data they think they might want to record because they think it might be helpful someday. One other comment: It is beginning to sound as if the OAWG could be an ongoing group. This might get to be a bit much for those who are on this group and the NOMC-TAC group. So, I would urge the appropriate people (don't know if that will be us or someone else) to carefully consider...the relationship between the OAWG and the NOMC-TAC group."

"The challenging part of this task (making it particularly interesting and fun) is the fact that the OARF and mapping/reporting application are developing and will continue to evolve based on the needs of their primary users - the RMLs and subcontractors. NLM's needs are very general and will likely be met with the data and reports that the RMLs agree are useful for their purposes. NNO stays involved in the development to make sure NLM's (general) needs will continue to be met and to help facilitate consensus among the regions. I'd like to see future thoughts about the general goal/purpose as well as the specific system requirements emerge bottom-up from the systems' primary users. Would it help to say that the primary goal/purpose of the OARF and mapping/reporting applications is to support (perhaps inform?) the outreach efforts of the RMLs? If we unpack the idea of supporting and informing outreach efforts, we see that the tasks of planning and evaluation are buried in there - pointing to OERC's leadership. Can we resolve questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 (and perhaps formulate data definitions in response to issue 3) with a team formed to focus on these issues in a specific period of time? Can we anticipate a need to revisit these and perhaps other issues on a regular (though perhaps infrequent) basis?"

"I'm sorry but I do not agree that the purpose of OARFs is to inform RML outreach. It's to generate maps and data required by NLM. I don't need information about how long my training sessions are, if they are conducted remotely, if CE credit was awarded, or which minority/priority groups are in the audience...It's great that we are working with the experience of this 5 year contract. I agree...that we can "anticipate a need to revisit these and perhaps other issues on a regular (though perhaps infrequent) basis." However, I think it's vital we have a clear set of guidelines at the onset of new contract period. From an evaluation perspective we should have the instrument and guidelines clarified now so we can

have consistent reporting throughout the contract. In the 25 years I've been doing this, we've always changed reporting and data collection multiple times mid-stream. Am I dreaming to hope this time could be different?"

“Continuing to collect data items that no one uses or can anticipate using of course does not make sense. Since NN/LM now has almost 5 years of data to look at, a visual and statistical examination of all those collected data to determine whether they actually can convey information that is useful to regions is advisable. Such an examination would be a significant task that is out of scope for April(!) - so this is a suggestion for the future.”

“Are you saying that even if we're doing a 15 minute presentation at a civic club meeting, or we're doing a site visit for 2 people at a small public library, or a presentation at an exhibit with a group of over 100 people, some of whom are coming and going, we're going get people to fill out PI sheets regardless of the context? That seems like not such a good idea to me. I would fill out an OARF for all of these situations, but I'd rather not do a PI sheet. Am I missing something? It seems to me that it maybe should stay on the list of questions.

“I think a team organized to focus on these issues in a specific period of time is a good idea. I'm glad Keith narrowed down the issue of what needs to be in the OARF is evaluation information to support and inform the outreach of the RMLs. For some reason it always seemed like a form that was for someone else's reporting needs (NLM's or NNO's). I always thought that we \*had\* to collect this information, and then find ways to adjust it to fit our needs as well. I apologize if everyone else already knew this--all of the sudden I feel like I'm just catching up. The discussion on whether or not we need the state information was enlightening to me.

“So maybe when we look at the answers to 1-5, we should start with a list of specific ways that RMLs can use the information if they want. And we should ask ADs and Coordinators if they are likely to use the information in those ways. And maybe we should find out if there is other information collected that nobody uses?”

## Attachment 1

PubMed/MedlinePlus Followup Survey  
Recommendation from Susan Barnes, Acting Assistant Director, OERC  
May 5, 2006

### RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that the PubMed/MedlinePlus followup survey be discontinued. If NNO approves this recommendation, the survey would cease effective May 15, 2006. Because email addresses are collected via the OARF Participant Information Sheet only for this survey, this feature will be removed from the Participant Information Sheet.

### RATIONALE

We have collected data from this survey that shows positive outcomes for a section of participants in our outreach efforts. I will summarize these results at the RML Directors' Meeting in Phoenix—the summary will be a brief update of what was presented to the all-NN/LM teleconference on September 14, 2005, which was an update of the presentation to the RML Directors in San Antonio. Briefly, we found improved confidence and skill in using PubMed and MedlinePlus; we found that participants in NN/LM outreach sessions have showed PubMed or MedlinePlus to others or referred people to the resources; results show a slight preference for hands-on computer training; and availability of CE credit did not have a predictable influence on participants' confidence or satisfaction. The survey has shown us a picture of outcomes of PubMed and MedlinePlus outreach, and these positive outcomes can be celebrated. The survey has also provided an opportunity to experiment with automated distribution via email addresses drawn from OARF PI Sheets and has been an experiment in collecting feedback from outreach participants across regions.

However, the survey provides information to us about outreach outcomes for only some of the participants in PubMed and MedlinePlus outreach sessions. Our most recent survey results show that 2885 surveys have been emailed to participants, but only 798 responses have been received, for a response rate of 28%. We do not know about the non-respondents—why they haven't responded, whether their outcomes were similar or very different from those of the respondents. The respondents may have been motivated to complete the survey because they were particularly happy with the outreach sessions they attended. Participants who were neutral or dissatisfied may be among the nonrespondents.

One approach would be to investigate the nonrespondents further. However, I am not recommending that we do this. I believe that there are additional issues with the methodology we have followed; issues that have only become clear as the followup survey has progressed:

- Use of email addresses from outreach participants is problematic. Many of the outreach participants hesitate to provide their addresses. Some coordinators are not comfortable with asking for email addresses. Where addresses are provided, the NN/LM coordinators report that deciphering and inputting handwritten addresses is time-consuming and riddled with potential errors. Suggestions regarding better ways to collect email addresses have included provision of an online form in each outreach session into which participants could type their email addresses. For classes that are not hands-on, the participants could type their email

addresses into the instructor's computer. The printed PI Sheet could be improved by providing more space for the email address and also by providing an example entry on the first line. But efforts to improve collection of email addresses should only be made if the survey is to be continued—and even if collection was improved, some outreach participants and coordinators would remain uncomfortable with asking for and providing email addresses. The discomfort stems partly from a concern for privacy but also involves a reluctance to be perceived as a source of email spam.

- We do not know what outreach experiences the participants have had. Surveys are sent to participants in outreach activities where the OARF Section 5 (“Session content”) includes either PubMed or MedlinePlus. OARF instructions for Section 5 state, “Select all that apply,” and PubMed or MedlinePlus could be the focus of the activity, or a very minor part. Responses, then, are regarding outreach activities that are not comparable.
- NN/LM staff has expressed a desire to learn about outcomes of outreach activities beyond those that include PubMed and MedlinePlus. They have also provided feedback that the followup survey does not provide results that are useful for planning or evaluating their outreach or teaching.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given the methodological issues with the PubMed/MedlinePlus followup survey, the recommendation presented above is to discontinue it rather than attempt to “fix” it. Planning for new approaches to outcome assessment will take place early in the 2006-2011 contract.

This planning will be facilitated by OERC, involve the regional evaluation liaisons, and include consideration of these questions:

- What are the regions' needs regarding evaluation of their outreach?
- What are NLM's needs regarding the regions' evaluation of their outreach?
- What are priorities for collecting outcome data?
- When does it make sense to collect data nationally?
- Is the OARF more than a tool for collecting activity data?