

Library Services and Technology Act

Five-Year Plan

2008-2012

A Focused Program for the Improvement of Library  
Services for the People of Pennsylvania through Federal

LSTA Funds

M. Clare Zales, Deputy Secretary

Office of Commonwealth Libraries

Pennsylvania Department of Education

*MISSION AND BACKGROUND:*

The mission of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries is to strengthen and improve all types of libraries; to meet the information, education and enrichment needs of Pennsylvania residents; and to operate a major research library. It accomplishes these activities by encouraging cooperation, supporting accessible library resources and advocating for libraries.

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) provides the Office of Commonwealth Libraries with a unique opportunity to meet the needs of Pennsylvania residents. Through its direction, areas of priority and funding support, LSTA provides the resources for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries to pursue new ways to identify and respond to specific needs of special audiences within the state, as well as all Pennsylvania residents' need for information and enrichment.

The development of this five-year plan was the culmination of a continuous evaluation from 2002 to 2007 (including a citizen survey in Spring, 2007) supplemented with analyses of Pennsylvania demographic data, as well as focus groups and interviews with librarians and Office of Commonwealth Libraries staff. The methods and the results of needs assessment activities are explained below.

Because the Office of Commonwealth Libraries increasingly focuses on outcome based evaluation of its programs, it has data to guide the development of the annual sub-grant application package and the evaluation plans included. Such evaluations support the overall evaluation of the LSTA program's progress and impact on the target audiences. The LSTA Five-Year Plan and established goals can assist libraries in understanding the use and purpose of LSTA funds. This last point will be particularly important because of the Office's decision to focus on two goals for the next five years.

Based on its recent needs assessment (appended), the Office has decided to focus in the next five years on two Goals. With that clarity of purpose, Commonwealth Libraries will encourage libraries to be more creative in finding ways to accomplish those goals, with a program of grantee initiated projects to fulfill them

The Office of Commonwealth Libraries, within the Pennsylvania Department of Education, operates a major research library and leads the development of the state's public, school, academic and special libraries to meet the information, education and enrichment needs of its residents. It is charged with providing libraries with direct services and indirect support.

Through the Bureau of the State Library (BLD), the Office of Commonwealth Libraries delivers library services to lawmakers and the public, and, through its BLD, the Office provides leadership in improving and coordinating library services and systems statewide.

The Bureau of Library Development coordinates and administers state aid for public libraries, district library centers and four statewide resource center libraries; offers consulting services; and sponsors continuing education for public, academic and special

library communities and for libraries within state-supported institutions. The Bureau of Library Development also serves libraries in public and private schools. It operates the Resource Center within the Department of Education, which provides information on education programs and practices for basic education, career and technical education and adult basic and literacy education.

More than 7,000 libraries serve the people of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's LSTA program attempts to reach most of these libraries and their constituencies through direct sub grants and statewide projects. The types of libraries are represented as follows: State aided public libraries – 467 (plus branches and other outlets), academic libraries – 219, special libraries – 627 and school libraries – 6,464 library facilities in public school districts and private schools. Regional library consortia, both single type and multi-type, serve libraries in all regions of the Commonwealth.

### *NEEDS ASSESSMENT*

At the completion of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries' evaluation of its 2002-2007 LSTA grant, the Office undertook a formal needs assessment for the 2008-2012 plan. Two consultants conducted a meta-analysis of the following earlier evaluations: (1) the evaluation of 2002-2007 final LSTA reports; (2) outcomes based evaluations of two state-wide programs: the Summer Reading Program and One Book Every Young Child; (3) a District Library Centers Study; (4) the Return on Investment Study; (5) results from citizen and librarian surveys conducted for the five year LSTA plan evaluation; (6) focus groups with school librarians and public/special/academic librarians; (7) interviews with Office of Commonwealth Libraries staff; and (8) public library district/system meeting discussions.

Two new sources of data supplemented these existing ones: a survey of Pennsylvania librarians about their needs and priorities for LSTA funding; and an analysis of projected demographic trends for the Commonwealth. A copy of the assessment is appended to this document.

### *GOALS OF OFFICE OF COMMONWEALTH LIBRARIES FOR 2008-2012 FUNDING:*

The needs assessment revealed extraordinary support for two of the six IMLS/LSTA purposes. The first two LSTA purposes are strongly favored (ranked as important or very important) by over half of the Pennsylvania librarians surveyed. These two are

*Developing library services that provide all users access to information through local, state, regional, national, and international electronic networks (58 percent); and*

*Expanding services for learning and access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats, in all types of libraries, for individuals of all ages (56 percent).*

The other four purposes (with percentages ranking important or very important) are (a) *Providing electronic and other linkages among and between all types of libraries* (33 percent); (b) *Developing public and private partnerships with other agencies and community-based organizations* (13 percent); (c) *Targeting library services to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to individuals with disabilities, and to individuals with limited functional literacy or information skills* (24 percent); and (d) *Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library and to underserved urban and rural communities, including children (from birth through age 17) from families with incomes below the poverty line* (33 percent).

These findings are consistent with other information from the Needs Assessment and have led the Office of Commonwealth Libraries to decide to focus on those two Goals over the next five years. This does not mean that needs related to the other purposes will be ignored. The other IMLS/LSTA purposes are subsumed by these two Goals. For example, a significant way in which the Office of Commonwealth Libraries expects to provide users access to information is by continuing its infrastructure support for POWER Library (a collection of licensed, online full text reference and periodical databases); and continued support for Ask Here PA (24/7 virtual reference), each of which provides “electronic and other linkages among and between all types of libraries. Similarly, because the citizen survey reveals certain inequalities in access, to accomplish goal 2 will necessitate targeting library services to certain key groups.

***Goal 1: Expand access to information resources for all Pennsylvania residents through infrastructure support and support for activities that enhance resource sharing.***

**LSTA Purposes supported:**

- Developing library services that provide all users access to information through local, state, regional, national, and international electronic networks
- Providing electronic and other linkages among and between all types of libraries
- Developing public and private partnerships with other agencies and community-based organizations

***EXPECTED ACTIVITIES:***

- POWER Library infrastructure support;
- ASKHERE PA, a virtual reference resource, support;
- Technology support and upgrades including assistive technology;
- Digitization/preservation of local history, unique collections, and materials in danger of deteriorating,

Accomplishment of this goal will provide improved access to existing resources and improve the number of resources to which users have access. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to continue to build the technological infrastructure for these services, including user interface. It will also necessitate programs to develop and enhance collaborations that increase shared staff and resources.

*OUTCOMES:*

The desired outcomes from this goal (with intended instruments for evaluation in brackets) are:

1. The technological infrastructure of libraries is better able to support shared access by librarians and their users [surveys of librarians and of users];
2. There is an adequate infrastructure to support electronic networks [interviews with CL staff; questionnaire regarding librarian satisfaction as follow up to 2007 needs assessment];
3. Librarians more fully collaborate in sharing resources with other libraries [final reports from libraries and consortial membership data];
4. Library users have increased knowledge about library resources available through electronic networks [statewide user surveys];
5. Librarians and users find it easier to use electronic resources [surveys of librarians and users]; and
6. Library users increasingly use the services of these networks [CL data].

More information about the methods for evaluating the success of these LSTA funded activities are listed later in this document and involve both statewide repeated measures and outcome based evaluation of individual grants.

***Goal 2: Pennsylvania libraries will expand services for learning and access to information and educational resources through improved resources and innovative programming.***

**LSTA Purposes supported:**

- Expanding services for learning and access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats, in all types of libraries, for individuals of all ages.
- Targeting library services to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to individuals with disabilities, and to individuals with limited functional literacy or information skills
- Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library and to underserved urban and rural communities, including children (from birth through age 17) from families with incomes below the poverty line.

***EXPECTED ACTIVITIES:***

- Collection development in all formats to update seriously aging collections;
- Projects to encourage emergent and family literacy;
- Continuation of the award winning One Book Every Young Child program to encourage intergenerational state-wide reading of a selected children's book
- Continuation of the statewide summer reading program for children and youth;
- Library initiated "innovative" programs to expand services and initiate new approaches to library services;

- Professional development, both state directed and locally conducted, to improve services for individuals of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to use libraries.

This goal encompasses a range of activities, one of the most important of which—based on our needs assessment—is collection development in all types of formats. We will not direct funding for libraries to have *more* books, lest libraries refrain from weeding; but instead will focus on improving the overall quality of collections as measured by average date of publication of print materials and user satisfaction with collections.

[Dissatisfaction with collections was frequently mentioned in open-ended comments in the 2007 citizen survey.]

Second, the Office of Commonwealth Libraries will focus on programs for children and families through funding for projects such as emergent and family literacy; through support, promotion and expansion of the One Book Every Young Child project, and by encouraging increased, more equitable, participation in the summer reading program. Our purpose is not only to assure that young new users are provided service; but also that their parents become knowledgeable about library resources. In the 2007 citizen survey, we found that individuals between 31 and 44 years of age (those most likely to be parents of young children) are less likely than other age groups to be aware of or use public libraries and are less likely to hold a library card.

Third, the Office of Commonwealth Libraries wishes to initiate a sub-grant program to encourage Pennsylvania libraries to propose innovative programs and services. The programs must fit under LSTA goals and also must have a clear process of outcome based evaluation. Our desire is to learn from failure as well as success: and to encourage libraries to be creative and experimental, while being accountable for the effects of new programs and services.

Finally, is the recognition to actively promote relevant professional development? In the 2007 needs assessment of librarians, the item with the highest overall ranking of 79.13 was “professional development for librarians.” Moreover, within the next five years twenty-five percent of Pennsylvania librarians responding to our survey intend to retire. To expand services for learning and access—to be successful in carrying out these priorities for LSTA funded projects-- the BLD will need to provide professional development to build leadership and knowledge in order to support the LSTA purposes listed on page 5. Of particular concern will be continued emphasis on teaching outcome based evaluation.

*OUTCOMES (with intended instruments for evaluation in brackets):*

The first desired outcome of Activity One, collection development:

1. The average age of Pennsylvania libraries’ collections will decrease by over 8 years on average in the next 5 years. [surveys of libraries—uses of OPAC data];
2. Libraries will collect diverse and useful materials [final reports from grants];

3. Citizen will become more satisfied with their local library collections. [statewide citizen surveys];
4. Libraries will devote more of their own resources toward collection development [grant final reports of matching funds provided for collection development grants].

Desired outcomes from the second activity involving programs for children and literacy activities are to:

1. Increase participation of children and youth in library programs, with particular attention to those from population groups less likely to be library users. [final reports from grantees; statewide citizen surveys]
2. Increase the number of library card holders from individuals ages 31 through 44 [statewide citizen surveys].

The intention of the third activity is:

1. Pennsylvania libraries will identify new and effective ways to expand “services for learning and access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats, in all types of libraries, for individuals of all ages” [outcome evaluation of individual grants];

The desired outcome from the fourth activity of professional development is:

1. Both librarians and support staff improve their abilities to provide effective library services [repeated surveys]

The methods for evaluating the success of these LSTA funded activities are more fully described below and involve both statewide repeated measures and outcome based evaluation of individual grants.

## THE BUREAU OF LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT’S ROLE IN ACCOMPLISHING GOALS

The means to accomplishing these goals is the Bureau of Library Development (hereafter referred to as BLD), which is the Bureau within the Office of Commonwealth Libraries that is responsible for supporting and encouraging the accomplishment of LSTA goals. Above all, the BLD is responsible for assuring that LSTA funds are spent in accordance with LSTA purposes, Office of Commonwealth Libraries priorities, the PA Department of Education vision, the appropriate laws and regulations of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the 117 STAT. 1000 PUBLIC LAW 108–81—SEPT. 25, 2003.

BLD’s other major activities will be to:

1. Collect, preserve and publish statistics, including those required for FSCS.
2. Further the uses of outcome based evaluation in Pennsylvania libraries;

3. Provide opportunities for professional development for librarians and library staff in order to improve services for individuals of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to use libraries;
4. Conduct statewide research on the effectiveness of libraries;
5. Provide infrastructure support for POWER Library and other cooperative electronic services;
6. Evaluate progress in accomplishing this plan.

Research projects undertaken with LSTA funding in the 2002-2007 cycle included a study of return on investment in Pennsylvania libraries, an evaluation of the Summer Reading Programs, a study of One Book Every Young Child, and a study of the Public Library District Centers. The BLD is still assessing needs for research in the 2008-2012 grant. The BLD is considering research on the library as “place” with the opportunity to explore spatial barriers to accomplishing Goal 2.

#### EVALUATION OF SUCCESS:

BLD’s evaluation of the extent to which its goals have been met will:

1. Build on data collected at the end of the 2002-2007 grant period;
2. Be carried out throughout the five year program;
3. Involve repeated measures, including pre and post-tests;
4. Involve sub-grantees as well as BLD staff; and
5. Use multiple methods including indirect measures, focus groups of stakeholders; and surveys of librarians and library users.

In the projects for which pre and posttest measures are appropriate and available, we will be able to measure the statistical significance of changes over time. By working with librarians to improve their uses of outcome based measures in the sub-grant program, we will be able to evaluate the relative successes of individual projects and projects by type of activity.

In funding for innovative projects, the BLD will emphasize evaluations that include failure analysis. Our intention is to encourage libraries to learn from their successes as well as failures, and not to hesitate to measure and report the outcomes of new projects.

To accomplish the overall evaluation of the success of the LSTA program, the BLD will, at a minimum, employ the following outcome assessments:

- Indirect measures—assess age of collections by surveys of libraries’ average age of collections, the first to be held early in the 5-year period and the last in early 2008; annual counts of uses of POWER Library and ASK HERE PA; transactional and other data from statewide system.
- Review of attendees’ evaluations of OBE training;



- Review of annual grants' final reports;
- 2007 [already completed] 2010 and 2012 Pennsylvania citizen surveys to assess knowledge and uses of LSTA supported services and unmet needs. This will include evaluation of whether children and 31-44 age adults have become more involved and levels of satisfaction with collections;
- Bi-annual surveys (building on completed 2007 survey) of all Pennsylvania librarians to assess LSTA funded programs, needs for new programs and other progress toward meeting goals;
- Focus group discussion at fall DLC meetings once a year beginning fall 2008 to assess LSTA funded programs, needs for new programs and other progress toward meeting goals.
- Annual semi-structured meetings with Office of Commonwealth Libraries staff

#### PROCEDURES TO INVOLVE LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY USERS:

Librarians and library users will be involved in continuous evaluation as noted in the section above (Evaluation).

COMMUNICATION: Describe the channels that will be used to communicate to the stakeholders the content of the State Plan and any results, products, processes, or benefits.

- Communication with librarians: Office of Commonwealth Libraries' webpage; training sessions with librarians about grant application process; call for proposals for sub-grants; surveys to librarians asking for feedback will articulate the formal goals; news notes in the Pennsylvania Library Association newsletter.
- Communication with users: User surveys articulating library products and services available; annual press release to Pennsylvania media about products and services; template for district libraries to develop customized local press packages

TRACKING PERFORMANCE: Describe the procedures for continuous tracking of current performance in relation to the State Plan.

Continuous tracking is embedded in the grant's evaluation. It specifies repeated measures building on the evaluation of the 2002-2007 program period. These will provide data, which may cause Commonwealth Libraries to modify or change the Plan, subject to IMLS approval.

*Needs Assessment:  
Background Information for Developing a New Five-Year Plan  
For LSTA Funding*

Leigh S. Estabrook and Jan O'Rourke, Consultants

*The following report provides a needs assessment for library development in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is based on (1) a survey of demographic trends for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; (2) a review of findings from earlier Commonwealth Libraries studies that provide insight into current needs; and (3) a review of research conducted with Commonwealth librarians and BLD staff regarding user needs and librarians priorities for future funding. These findings will provide background and context for the development of a 2008-2012 Five-Year Plan for the uses of LSTA funding.*

***(1) Pennsylvania Trends***

In its recently published report “Committing to Prosperity: Moving Forward on the Agenda to Renew Pennsylvania”, the Brookings Institution finds that many of the state’s downward trends continue: cities and towns are losing residents and businesses; rural landscapes and farms are giving way to unbalanced development; young people are leaving for better opportunities in other states; the economy, struggling to regain its footing from the loss of its manufacturing base, is still lagging; growth among non-metropolitan counties is uneven with lost population in the western part of the state and growth in the south central and northeastern regions.

Pennsylvania grew at a rate of just 0.24% from 2000 to 2005 to reach a total population of 12,440,621. The increase in population was attributed to in-migration of minorities and Hispanics, most of whom have settled in eastern Pennsylvania. A concentration of minorities and persons living in poverty in urban areas has created some of the most segregated communities in the nation.

Pennsylvania is one of the most rural states in the country. Overall, the rural counties are experiencing a loss of population while urban counties are seeing more rapid growth in their 2<sup>nd</sup> class townships. Rural residents earn less on average than urban residents, have less access to educational opportunities, and are experiencing a “brain drain” as young people migrate out to better opportunities elsewhere. At the same time well-educated baby boomers are beginning to retire, further contributing to a workforce and skills shortage. These retired and older residents can be expected to need more social services and health care.

There is some evidence that Pennsylvania institutions are making a commitment to renewal. The Brookings Institution report finds that Pennsylvania is beginning to revitalize its economy to become globally competitive. It has begun to implement a cluster and workforce-based strategy for generating better paying, longer-lasting jobs. It is reinvesting in older communities and rural areas thus strengthening Pennsylvania’s unique quality of place, a move that will contribute to its ability to retain and attract skilled

workers and prosperous businesses. The current state administration has launched the Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment and Resource Conservation, and has initiated JobReady PA designed to rebuild training systems and career ladders, create permanent industry training partnerships, and invest in post secondary education and training. It is working to empower local government to manage change more effectively, to combat fiscal distress, and to implement sound land management practices. Educational support, particularly K-12, is a priority. Collaboration and partnership are recognized as components for success and sustainability.

***(2) Insights from earlier evaluations***

The consultants reviewed the following earlier evaluations: (1) the evaluation of 2002-2007 final LSTA reports; (2) outcomes based evaluations of two state-wide programs: the Summer Reading Program and One Book Every Young Child; (3) a District Library Centers Study; (4) the Return on Investment Study; (5) results from citizen and librarian surveys conducted for the Bureau of Library Development's (BLD) five year LSTA plan evaluation; (6) focus groups with school librarians and public/special/academic librarians; (7) interviews with BLD staff; and (7) district/system meeting discussions. Findings from this review were generally consistent with findings from the spring, 2007 librarian survey in the perceived needs and priorities for LSTA funding.

Across the board there was broad agreement for the need to fund projects that encourage partnerships (school/public library partnerships received particular praise); to continue support for BLD statewide initiatives such as support for POWER Library, the summer reading program, One Book Every Young Child, Access PA and AskHere PA; to provide opportunities for professional development; to continue funding for projects that assure that all Pennsylvanians have access to current technologies (including assistive technology) and collections; and services to special populations.

Also deemed important by some constituencies, but without the broad consensus indicated above, are the following:

- Dual enrollment grants
- Early literacy development
- Strategic Planning assistance
- Masters degree awards
- Board training and development
- Outcomes based evaluation (OBE) education
- Partnership with the PA Humanities Council
- Digitization/preservation
- Recruitment and mentoring of new staff
- Equity of access for rural areas
- Disaster and facilities management planning

The state-wide survey of Pennsylvania residents conducted for the Five-Year Evaluation suggests a number of areas of needs from the perspective of Pennsylvania

citizens. If we look just at those groups for which library use is significantly less than that of other groups, we find that individuals between 31 and 44 years of age are less likely to be aware of or use public libraries and are less likely to hold a library card. We also know that less than half of those who say they have a handicap hold a library card. This compares to an overall percentage of 72.5 claiming to have a card. And women are more likely to hold cards than men as are those with Internet access in their home and those with at least a college education. These findings point to specific populations groups for which there may be a need to target library services. And we know that libraries may well be providing important services to the unemployed since the survey indicates that job seekers are more likely to use the library than those employed.

And as much as librarians support the value of POWER Library, it is still not very well known to Commonwealth residents. Those who do know about it who are better educated and have a home internet access are significantly more likely to use this service than others.

Although not formally coded, the open-ended responses to the Pennsylvania residents' survey indicate a strong desire for better and more contemporary collections in local public libraries.

***(3) Priorities of Pennsylvania Librarians and BLD staff: findings from recent surveys and discussions***

We surveyed approximately 2,000 *Pennsylvania* librarians from a list held by the Bureau of Library Development (the exact number is not known because some email addresses are duplicates). From those, we received 824 valid responses. The questions asked respondents to indicate their highest priorities for funding specific types of projects and asked them to rank order the LSTA overall priorities for funds. We also asked about intentions to retire as an aid in planning.

Pennsylvania librarians were asked the following question:

*The following list represents some of the key programs Commonwealth Libraries has supported and/or identified as needing more support. Please indicate the relative importance of funding each of the programs listed. NOTE--your answers are not about the importance of the program; but the importance of having LSTA funding for such a program.*

Respondents were given five choices: (1) Very Important, (2) Important; (3) No opinion; (4) Unimportant; or (5) No need to fund. There was no restriction on the answers, making it seem possible for someone, for example, to rank all items as "very important." The results show a strong preference for 7 items; with a dramatic break between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> ranked program. These were collapsed and are reported as a percentage of respondents indicating "very important" or "important."

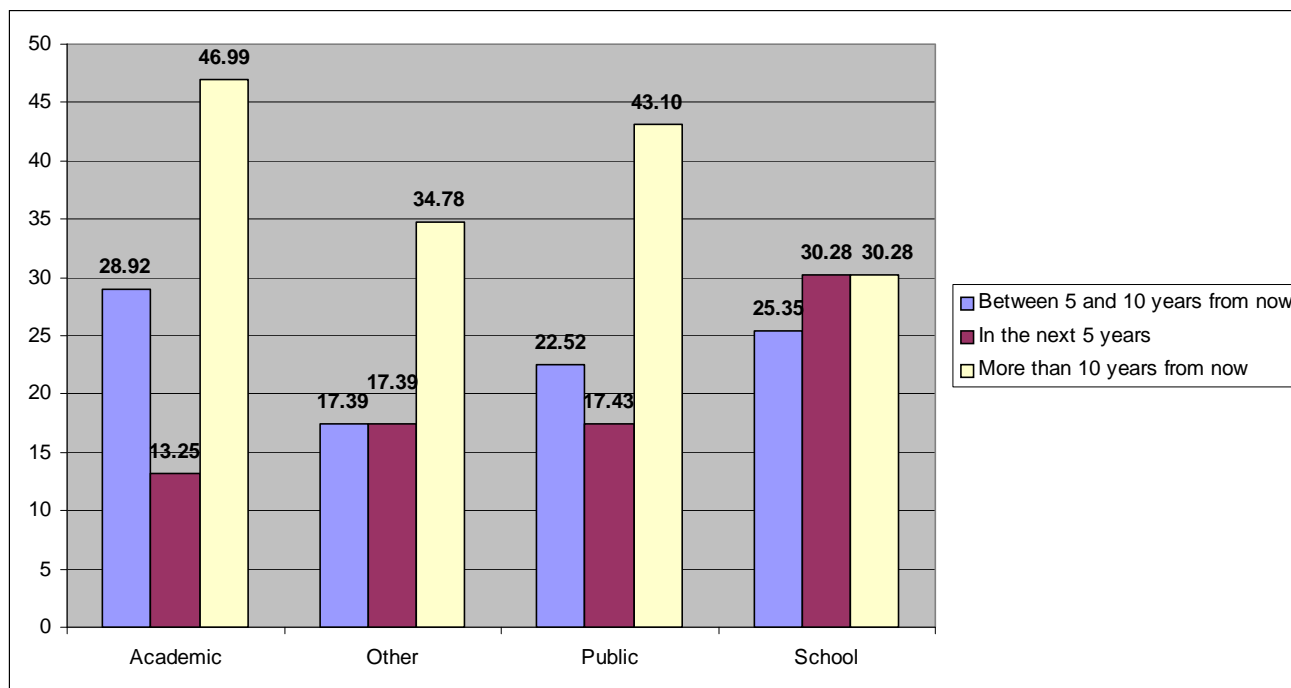
The item with the highest overall item ranking of 79.13 was “professional development for librarians.” This is not the same as support for the MLS for which only half of the respondents (52.67) indicated “very important” or “important.” The fact that something like “migration to talking books” is ranked quite low does not mean it should not be funded. Talking books are the responsibility of the LBPH and not all libraries and unlikely to be seen as high a priority simply because they aren’t in the domain of most respondents. Nonetheless we were both pleased and surprised to see the strong level of agreement on priorities across the different types of libraries. Beside support for professional development, librarians care most about LSTA funding for POWER Library infrastructure, for collection development (mentioned often by the public in our state-wide survey), and for programs for children and youth—including those that increase collaboration.

Table I  
Importance of Various LSTA funded programs to Librarians in the Commonwealth.

<i>Category of funding</i>	<i>% saying important or very important</i>
Professional development for librarians	79.13
Infrastructure support for POWER Library	74.51
Collection Development	74.03
Programming for children	73.30
Summer reading program	73.06
Programming for young adults	72.69
Programs that increase collaboration between my library and others (for example, teachers in schools or community organizations with public libraries)	70.75
Research about the effectiveness of library programs and services	62.01
Family Place libraries and other family literacy programs	60.44
Programs for older adults	59.59
One Book Every Young Child	57.40
Information literacy programs using wireless laptop labs	55.46
Support for individuals to obtain the MLS	52.67
Digitization of collections	50.49
Statistics and reports from Commonwealth Libraries	43.69
Pennsylvania Humanities Program collaboration	41.38
Research about other topics	33.62
Migration to digital talking books	32.04

Professional development for librarians does, indeed, seem critically important. Approximately 25 percent of the respondents to the survey said they intend to retire in the next 5 years—30 percent of the directors who responded to the survey said they will leave the profession within 5 years. And 30 percent of school librarians say they will retire that soon.

Table 2  
Plans for Retirement by Type of Library Employment



Finally, we were eager to see how Pennsylvania librarians ranked the six priorities set by LSTA for funding. As Table 3 (below) indicates, the first two LSTA priorities are strongly favored (ranked as important or very important) by over half of the Pennsylvania librarians surveyed. These two are

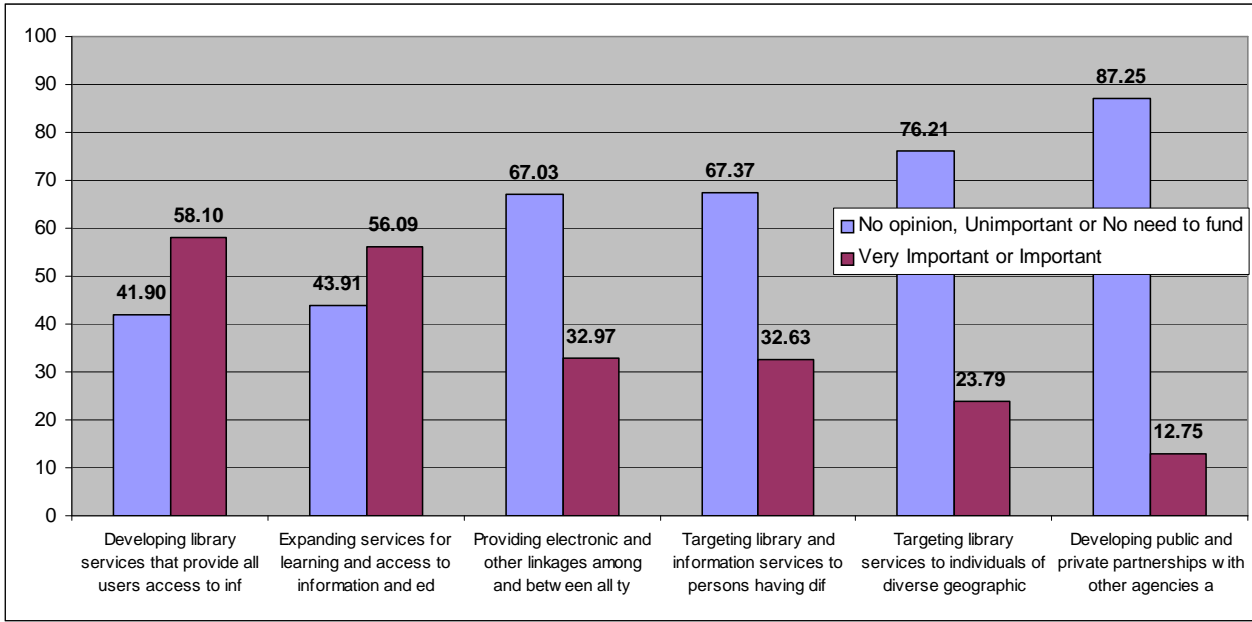
*Developing library services that provide all users access to information through local, state, regional, national, and international electronic networks (58 percent); and*

*Expanding services for learning and access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats, in all types of libraries, for individuals of all ages (56 percent).*

The other four priorities (with percentages ranking important or very important following) are (a) *Providing electronic and other linkages among and between all types of libraries (33 percent);* (b) *Developing public and private partnerships with other agencies and community-based organizations (13 percent);* *Targeting library services to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to individuals with disabilities, and to individuals with limited functional literacy or information skills (24 percent);* and *Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using*

*a library and to underserved urban and rural communities, including children (from birth through age 17) from families with incomes below the poverty line (33 percent).*

Table 3  
Pennsylvania Librarians' Ranking of LSTA Funding Priorities



One question to consider—and we asked of BLD staff-- is whether the 4 lower ranked priorities might be considered subsets of the two highest ranked ones. (This may well have been the thinking of some of the respondents.) Is, for example, “Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library and to the underserved...” one way of accomplishing one of the top priorities, “Expanding services...”?

On May 21, 2007, the consultants met with staff of the Bureau of Library Development to understand how they see priorities and needs for LSTA funding. The conversations revealed differences in ways to approach the LSTA priorities; but a strong consensus that the previously funded programs are important to continue. A theme that recurred throughout these conversations is the need to use LSTA funds to encourage experimentation with innovative programs. These projects could be evaluated (positive or negative) using OBE and, if worthy, offered as model programs. We made one additional suggestion that in view of the current interest in “library as place” a study, similar to the ROI study, might be a new research project.

***Conclusions:***

The BLD faces a difficult decision. A general consensus about the importance of two IMLS priorities and strong support for a selection of LSTA funded Pennsylvania projects would suggest BLD could be more strategic and focused in its grant-making. But some relatively low-ranked programs must be funded. The conversion to digital books for the Library of the Blind and Physically Handicapped is the best example of this. And staff members at the Bureau do not agree that the new Five-Year Plan should limit the number of IMLS priorities the Commonwealth will address in its activities.

The Five-Year evaluation found many areas of success in programs funded by LSTA monies. Certainly the relative poverty of Pennsylvania libraries makes it possible for many different programs to make a difference in their communities. And the state-wide user survey, ROI and summer reading program research suggest ways in which access to library services can be improved.

Each of the pieces of this needs assessment—from the survey of demographics to the conversations at the Bureau—suggest the potential value of the BLD focussing on improved and expanded access. The rural nature of the Commonwealth, the limited understanding of POWER Library, the fact that individuals 31 - 44 are underrepresented as library users (even though that is the age with children) are just three of the factors we would point to. The BLD has achieved a great deal in the past using its LSTA funds. Its investment in evaluation and measurement gives it new tools to identify ways it might choose to go in the future.

Although librarians recognize the need for better collections, they do not as frequently mention addressing the needs of those groups the citizen survey identifies as less frequent library users. This is not surprising. Many librarians are stretching to meet the needs of those who are users. We suspect that few libraries have the resources necessary to “convert” non-users to users. But if that is so, it becomes all the more important for Commonwealth Libraries to decide whether those special groups should be formally identified in the 2007-2012 plan or whether improved access for current users is a better strategy.



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