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**Museum** *and* **Library**  
SERVICES

*Measuring Success Update*

*COSLA April Meeting*

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Working in an initiative called *Measuring Success*, IMLS collaborated extensively with teams comprised of State Library Administrative Agency (SLAA) staff over the past 12 months to propose a significantly strengthened Grants to States reporting framework.

This memo provides an update of the Measuring Success Initiative, focusing on proposed recommendations for modifying the current State Program Reports (SPR) fields to better enable comparison across project activities, streamline cost compliance reporting and strengthen outcome-based performance reporting. The memo highlights include:

1. A strategy for standardization of data collection to better capture a wide variety of library program services and activities funded in SLAAs through Grants to States using the six focal areas (lifelong learning, human services, employment and economic development, digitization, database services, and civic engagement) that emerged from planning workshops with SLAA participants.
2. Recommendations for concentrating data collection at three levels – SLAA actions, project/point of service actions (typically but not exclusively libraries) and user/beneficiary outcomes.
3. An outline for continued cooperative work between IMLS and volunteer SLAA to modify the SPR for data collection at SLAA and project/point of service levels and to pilot for test collection user outcomes.

### **1. Goals of Enhanced Grants to States Reporting Process and Key Focal Areas**

Six planning teams composed of 68 volunteers from 54 SLAAs identified many different activities corresponding to LSTA priority areas. Six key focal areas representing these priorities were identified (see Section 4). These focal areas comprise common generic focuses for library service across the States, making it easier to nationally aggregate activities and results. While States can implement services supported by Grants to States in many ways, teams felt that it was critical to develop a scheme that clearly communicates their cumulative impact on the priorities identified in the authorizing legislation, which is currently difficult if not impossible.

IMLS wants to identify the total served geographically, correlate contributing national investments, identify the range of partnerships that address each goal, and provide evidenced-based information about impact on program participants—all critical data for national decision-making. Though many SLAAs have worked to answer these questions within their States, data has historically been reported to IMLS inconsistently across States. Without greater consistency, summarized in clearly defined program categories, it will be increasingly hard to show the continued need for Grants to States, or for that matter LSTA.

Consistent reporting will also strengthen communities of practice across States (and thus across libraries). Building a consistent language for activities supported by Grants to States helps Chief Officers, LSTA coordinators, and IMLS program and evaluation staff share program information, compare and contrast services, and evaluate and promote effective practices. While SLAAs have improved public outreach and evaluation for library services, it remains challenging to compare one SLAA's initiatives with those in other States—even across the same types of activities. The current online SPR has not facilitated linking library programs to LSTA priorities, and the reporting format, which records project designs, implementation, and necessary resources has not encouraged consistency. SLAAs report these elements in free-text fields. Although IMLS has tried to develop structured vocabularies and other strategies for standardization, these have produced little continuity, in part because the underlying legislation provides wide discretion to each State in meeting its public's library needs. The unintended result has been data incompatible with efficient analysis and comparison.

Note that winnowing Grants to States efforts to six focal areas is *not* intended to govern program activities or to limit SLAA authority to design programs that address a particular State's needs. Nor is it prescriptive for program design. Identifying a limited number of focal areas is meant to aggregate the broad range of activities funded by Grants to States ways, so their importance to the public is readily understood and meaningful.

## 2. Developing a Consistent Foundation for Grants to States Reporting

Building a reporting system to gather information across a wide range of programs and settings raises many practical challenges. Perhaps the most significant is developing a logically consistent system to categorize programs that fall under the broad banner of the Grants to States. IMLS and its SLAA collaborators made every effort to account for current programs delivered under the Grants to States umbrella while developing focal areas that address current legislative and public policy priorities.

Together, *Measuring Success* collaborators developed logical sequences of opportunities and challenges (“results chains”) that commonly impact desired results. Over several months of web- and phone-based meetings, approximately 20 results chains were created and combined into the six focal areas based on commonalities among their desired results. For lifelong learning activities, results focused on transferring knowledge or skills to advance educational aims. For human services, intended results focused on targeted information and services to remediate social problems and improve participants’ quality of life. Employment and economic development targeted economic needs of individuals and communities. Digitization projects focused on systematic initiatives to improve digital access to objects, images, sounds, and documents for preservation and/or broadened collections use. Target results for database services concentrated on reducing the costs of delivering electronic content efficiently and cost effectively. Finally, the category of civic engagement and e-government services focused on effective links between individuals and their government. Section 4 cross walks activities frequently associated with each focus. These activity lists are not exhaustive. Moving forward, IMLS will seek the help and counsel of the SLAAs to populate the six focus areas with a full range of activities Grants to States support in each category.

## 3. Outline of the Data Collection Strategy

As described in October, results chains and assessment questions identified by planning teams provide the base for a new IMLS Grants to States performance report platform. Three levels of analysis were identified for each result chain: the SLAAs, the project or point of service (typically a local library, but an SLAA or other entity may be the unit when project activities are managed at the State level), and the end user or beneficiary. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Levels of Analysis for IMLS Grants to States Reports



SLAA planners felt it was important to gather data at each level. Assessment data described below reflect the recommendations of these collaborators. This information is an *outline* for SLAA Chiefs and does not represent the format of questions to gather the data.

In coming months IMLS and volunteer SLAA staff will develop questions to provide data needed at each level. Note that at present, SPR data collection for all States will focus on the first two levels: SLAA actions and Project/Point of Service (blue). Collection of End User/Beneficiary information (yellow) will only be piloted by a small group of volunteer SLAAs to develop protocols that are relatively simple to use, inform program planning, and are replicable across a variety of settings. IMLS will form a task force of interested SLAAs and LIS researchers to develop data collection instruments for required Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval in fall 2012. SPR reports for the new SLAA five-year plans are anticipated to begin in December 2014. Because a new or substantially modified reporting platform will probably be needed to accommodate the new data, IMLS will begin the contracting process for this work in FY13. With these caveats, a brief draft outline of the data IMLS anticipates needing in the next five-year Grants to States cycle follows.

**SLAA Actions.** While SLAAs take many different roles in implementing activities funded by IMLS Grants to States, participants identified common activities for data collection at this level:

- Descriptions of SLAA planning and policy guidance
- Details of SLAA-directed training and staff development for its focus category(ies)
- Descriptions of project management (i.e. direct SLAA oversight, State-level contracting, grant competitions, etc.)
- Descriptions of State-wide partnerships to address the identified need
- Details of infrastructure support to address the identified need (e.g., IT assistance).

**Project Level/Point of Service.** Data collection at this level represents the greatest overlap with current SPR data elements. Data in this section will permit comparison of program services. The characteristics of program services will be emphasized, as will partnerships, project costs, and summary counts of program beneficiaries. This information will probably include:

- Description of program characteristics
  - Staffing resources
  - Material and IT resources
  - Mode of service delivery (e.g. on-site, distance learning, off-site)
  - Service hours (e.g. total planned program service hours)
- Identification of local partnerships (categorized by type)
- Target audience
- Total number of direct beneficiaries/program participants
- Costs of program service (broken out by Federal, State and local contributions)

**End User/Program Beneficiaries.** Data collection at the beneficiary level comprises information about users and the results of their experiences. Information sought at this level will probably include:

- Demographic characteristics of participants
- Customer satisfaction
- Measures of knowledge gain or other added value from program participation
- Measures of new users participating in program activity
- Estimates of users participating in other program activities

The following example helps clarify this draft data collection scheme. Many SLAAs help support local libraries in providing tax information services to the public. At the SLAA level, the focus is, of course, supporting services. Collected data will describe SLAA involvement, including details of planning/policy guidance (e.g., existence of a Statewide policy directing related libraries' involvement and the nature of any supporting partnerships such as collaboration with a Statewide department of revenue and taxation); the number of awards made using Grants to States funds and their corresponding monetary value; and the extent of training SLAAs offer to participating libraries and others to support end-user tax information services.

Data collection at the point of service will focus on information that can be readily obtained from the direct service entity. In the case of tax services, we assume information will come from libraries supported through an SLAA project grant for this purpose, although other models are possible. Data would identify partnerships developed for tax information services, such as with a local IRS office or a community-based financial advisory group. It would include the nature of tax-payment information or support services offered by libraries. This might range from simple availability of free tax forms and documents, to web-based portals and modules, to on-site counseling. For each point of service contact (e.g., public library) data would be collected about service types and "intensity." For instance, if a library provides free tax forms and documents, the number of such documents distributed over a certain time interval (e.g. January through April) might be reported. If service is more active, for example counseling, the measure of intensity might document the nature of the counseling (e.g., 20 one-time, one-hour counseling sessions). Beneficiary data at this level would be limited to identifying the target audience for program service and the total number of direct beneficiaries/program participants. A final measure at this level would involve cost, including a breakdown of Federal, State, and local contribution and any user fees).

For SLAAs involved in pilot data collection at the beneficiary level, we identify the following potential content. Pertinent information specific to users of the tax service would be collected with attention to the protection of confidentiality and privacy. For instance, if service is limited to providing free tax-related documents in a local library, only data on the extent and number of materials distributed would be collected. If the activity involved in-library tax counseling, data collection might entail voluntary demographic profiles. Data collection could extend to hard-copy or on-line surveys to gauge knowledge gained or benefits acquired from participation in the service, or participants might be asked about their satisfaction with the service and/or their likelihood of referring other users.

The transition to collecting beneficiary information will proceed incrementally. Almost all SLAA-specific information is collected through the existing SPR, and proposed changes will focus on simplifying reporting. Similarly, much information gathered about point of service providers and related grants (in many cases to public libraries), is also collected in the SPR. The focus will be to simplify reporting, make it consistent in content and format, and provide useful reports for State and Federal use. IMLS will work with its SLAA collaborators to gradually build capacity for new or different data collection methods. Capacity building will test protocols with volunteer SLAA pilot projects across entire States or in select locales. Once pilots are deemed successful, efforts will expand the collection of like data across SLAAs.

The biggest administrative challenge will be collecting data specific to users/beneficiaries. Much data at this level will *not* be collected in the first round of the new five-year planning cycle. All else being equal, the vast majority of data at the user level will follow testing and refinement of protocols at the SLAA and project levels.

#### 4. Cross-Walk of Services/Activities with Focus Areas

Focus Category	Service/Activity	Target Users/Beneficiaries
Lifelong learning	Supplementary school programs (“youth services”)	K-12 students (includes underserved populations)
	Family/early literacy programs (e.g., Even Start, storytimes, STAR)	Pre-school youth, including those with limited pre-literacy skills; parents and other caregivers, including parents/caregivers with limited literacy skills
	Adult literacy programs (e.g., GED, ESL classes, collaboration with community colleges)	Adults with limited literacy skills, including underserved groups and those with economic hardships (e.g., unemployed)
	Library services for special populations (e.g., talking books)	Users with limited literacy or functional information skills or other disadvantages; older adults.
	Computer Access Digital literacy services	Users of all ages, including underserved
Human Services	Parenting (education, training, information resources)	Parents and caregivers, including disabled and underserved
	Financial planning/personal finance information or referral	Adults and teens including special populations such as underserved, unemployed, veterans and older adults
	Tax-related information and services	Many groups of adults, including underserved
	Health care information and related services	Adults and young adults, including underserved
	Social services information and referral (e.g.,	Many groups, including underserved

	rehabilitation services, housing assistance for homeless)	
Employment and small business development	Job-search assistance	Adult and teen population, including unemployed
	Job-training information, assistance	Working population, including unemployed
	Small-business related services (information, referral)	Individuals in small businesses
Digitization	Scanning special collections	Users across the State; students and researchers nationally
	Scanning of public documents	Executive and legislative branches of government; users across the State
Database procurement	State-level purchase of electronic databases for institutions	Public, school and academic libraries; other libraries
	State-level purchase of electronic databases for use by individuals	Users across the State

### **5. Timetable: Next Steps**

Spring 2012	IMLS will hold two webinars to discuss the proposed design solicit feedback from SLAAs
Summer 2012	IMLS (working with SLAA volunteers) will develop new State Program Report protocols for review by COSLA at the October meeting
Fall 2012	IMLS submits the new SPR to OMB for review and approval
Fall 2012	IMLS will begin work with volunteer SLAAs to design and execute the pilot project for end user/beneficiary data collection [this work will span approximately a year]
Fall/Winter 2012	IMLS will begin contracting process to develop the new SPR reporting system
Spring 2013	IMLS will begin to pilot test the new SPR data reporting tool with States and will contract to develop the new SPR reporting system.