

**Preprint – cite as:**

Pomerantz, J., Hank, C., McClure, C. R., & Andrade, J. (in press). A Meta-Assessment of Statewide Program Evaluations: Matching Evaluation Methods to Program Goals. In F. DeFranco, et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Library Assessment Conference: Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment, August 4-6, 2008*. Seattle, WA.

**A Meta-Assessment of Statewide Program Evaluations:  
Matching Evaluation Methods to Program Goals**

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## **Abstract**

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), supports a greater number of libraries within the U.S., and a wider range of library activities, than any other single federal grant program.

The authors therefore decided to perform a meta-analysis of states' LSTA evaluations as a means to inform future LSTA evaluations. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What methodologies are used in LSTA evaluations?
2. How do states' goals map to LSTA goals?
3. What, if any, correlations are there between methodologies used and states' and LSTA goals?
4. How successful are different methodologies in providing useful evaluation data about library programs?

Ultimately, the purpose of this effort is to assist state library agencies and the IMLS to increase the usefulness and impact of LSTA-funded programs. The findings from this research suggests that the quality of these evaluation reports varies widely, that there is minimal innovation in the evaluation methods employed, and only 39% of the goals were assessed as completely accomplished.

## **Introduction**

One of the most important federal funding streams for public libraries in the United States is the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Under the LSTA, the IMLS provides funds to state library agencies based on the populations of states, and state library agencies then distribute these funds to libraries within the states (Museum and Library Services Act, 2002). Consequently, LSTA funds support a greater number of libraries within the U.S., and a wider range of library activities, than any other single federal grant program.

Evaluation is an important, and at times required, part of any program, to assess the extent to which the program is achieving its goals. Evaluation is especially important for funding agencies to assess how this funding is being used to support the program funders' goals. Given the ubiquity of LSTA funds in public libraries across the U.S. and the diversity of projects supported by these funds, evaluation is especially important to the IMLS, as well as to the funding recipients, to insure that those project goals are being accomplished. The IMLS, consequently, requires grantees to conduct evaluation of funded projects, and provides considerable guidance to grantees on how to conduct outcome based evaluation<sup>1</sup>.

The authors recently completed an evaluation of the programs funded by LSTA monies allocated to the state of North Carolina for the years 2003-2007<sup>2</sup>. This paper extends that work by investigating the evaluations of LSTA-funded programs in other states. There is

a sizeable body of library literature on evaluation of various functions and services of libraries. This literature is, however, essentially a series of case studies: reports of single evaluation efforts on single library functions or services. In planning our evaluation of LSTA-funded programs in North Carolina, we found that there is little literature that provides models for evaluating large-scale library initiatives, involving multiple functions and services across multiple libraries. The IMLS has made states' 2003-2007 evaluation reports publicly available on their website (and before that, made the 1998-2002 evaluation reports available: [www.imls.gov/programs/5yearevals.shtm](http://www.imls.gov/programs/5yearevals.shtm)). For the most part, these reports include basic descriptions of the methodologies used in these evaluations. Neither the IMLS nor the individual states nor the evaluators who produced these reports, however, provide any detailed information on why specific methodologies were used, why data were collected from some stakeholder groups and not others, how decisions were made regarding how to frame discussion of states' outcomes in the reports, and other issues involved in the planning for these evaluations.

When the authors planned the evaluation of LSTA-funded programs in North Carolina, they reviewed other states' evaluation reports as models and as a source for ideas. Based on our informal conversations with other evaluators, it seems that this approach is quite common. It is clear that other evaluators, and librarians in state library agencies, have a need for information about the evaluations that have been conducted in other states, of LSTA-funded programs, beyond that which is included in the evaluation reports themselves or from informal, anecdotal information gathering. Indeed, since all 50 states (and U.S. territories) must perform such an evaluation every five years, there is potentially a great demand for this information. The authors therefore decided to perform a meta-analysis of states' LSTA evaluations as a means to inform future LSTA evaluations. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What methodologies are used in LSTA evaluations?
2. How do states' goals map to LSTA goals?
3. What, if any, correlations are there between methodologies used and states' and LSTA goals?
4. How successful are different methodologies in providing useful evaluation data about library programs?

Ultimately, the purpose of this effort is to assist state library agencies and the IMLS to increase the usefulness and impact of LSTA-funded programs. The findings from this research suggests that the quality of these evaluation reports varies widely, that there is minimal innovation in the evaluation methods employed, and only 39% of the goals were assessed as completely accomplished.

## Background on the IMLS and LSTA

The IMLS' Grants to States program ([www.imls.gov/programs/programs.shtm](http://www.imls.gov/programs/programs.shtm)) provides funds to state library agencies proportional to the populations of states. These funds are provided to all 50 states as well as to the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. In 2008 the IMLS awarded nearly \$161 million in LSTA funds to state library agencies (down from nearly \$164 million in 2006 and 2007). As of the fiscal year 2008 allotments, California receives the largest sum of any state from the IMLS, and Wyoming the smallest. Given their population sizes, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam receive larger sums than several states<sup>3</sup>. Each state library agency then distributes these funds to libraries within its state. The mechanisms for accomplishing this distribution vary across states. Often this allocation is accomplished by awarding sub-grants to individual libraries or consortia. Sometimes sums are earmarked for specific collaborative projects within a state. There is considerable variance in how state library agencies allocate LSTA funds within their states.

Consequently, LSTA funds support a significant number of libraries within the U.S. and its territories, and a wide range of library activities as well. While LSTA funds comprise less than 15% of total state library funding<sup>4</sup>, LSTA funds comprise 97% of all federal funding to state library agencies<sup>5</sup>. In total, "state library agency expenditures for financial support to libraries were \$754.1 million"<sup>6</sup>; even 15% of this sum is considerable. The LSTA is therefore arguably the single most important funding stream for U.S. libraries, for the sums awarded, its key role in supporting state library agencies, and its reach into libraries of all types.

Of particular relevance to this paper are two requirements of the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, enacted as part of the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 1997 (Public Law (P.L.) 104-208), for state library agencies to submit documentation to the IMLS. First, state library agencies must submit a State Plan. This document "identifies a State's library needs, and sets forth the activities to be taken toward meeting the identified needs supported with the assistance of" LSTA funds<sup>7</sup>. Second, state library agencies that receive LSTA funds (that is, all of them) must conduct an independent evaluation and submit a report on the activities funded using LSTA funds, "prior to the end of the 5-year plan"<sup>8</sup>.

The IMLS has produced a number of documents for grant applicants and recipients, on project planning and evaluation ([www.imls.gov/applicants/obe.shtm](http://www.imls.gov/applicants/obe.shtm)). These materials make it clear that IMLS wishes to convey – and wishes their grantees to convey – the effects and impacts made by their programs. As such, the IMLS has created several documents on outcomes-based planning and evaluation, and asks their grantees to write their grant proposals and evaluations to emphasize the program outcomes.

## Methodology

The authors collected 5-year plans and evaluation reports for both the 1998-2002 and 2003-2007 LSTA funding cycles. The authors were able to collect both of these documents for both 5-year time periods, for a total of 28 states. The analyses presented below are from those 28 states' documents.

It was not possible to collect documents for all 50 states and all territories due to the time when this collection was being done, in mid-2007. The IMLS makes states' 5-year plans and evaluation reports available on their website ([www.imls.gov/programs/programs.shtml](http://www.imls.gov/programs/programs.shtml)), and many state library agencies make these documents available on their own websites. In mid-2007, however, many states were concluding evaluations of their LSTA-funded programs, and were submitting the reports from these evaluations to the IMLS. In mid-2007, 1998-2002 evaluation reports were being replaced by 2003-2007 reports both on the IMLS website and on state library agencies' sites. Consequently, in many cases the 1998-2002 reports were no longer available, while in other cases the 2003-2007 reports were not yet available. The authors only used states' 5-year plans and evaluation reports in our analyses when we could collect both documents for both date ranges.

The authors conducted a content analysis on the 5-year plans and evaluation reports to identify the following data. From the 5-year plans, this content analysis identified: (1) the states' 5-year goals, and (2) the articulation of the connection between the state's goals and the LSTA's goals. From the evaluation reports, this content analysis identified the following:

- The research methodologies and data collection instruments used in these evaluations;
- The stakeholder groups that provided data;
- Whether and the extent to which the states' and the LSTA's goals were accomplished; and
- Recommendations made by the evaluators.

The authors developed a coding scheme to identify these data in the 5-year plans and evaluation reports. Some of these data were easy to identify: for example, many evaluation reports stated clearly if goals were fully, partly, or not accomplished. Some of these data required more interpretation: for example, many reports did not explicitly draw a connection between the state's goals and the LSTA's goals, so the researchers had to determine how to map one to the other. In order to achieve reliable coding, our coding scheme was piloted by all of the authors, and revised, before using it for our analysis. Further, each state's report was coded by two of the authors, and points of disagreement were discussed until consensus was achieved. The authors coded data in the 5-year plans and evaluation reports in a shared Excel file, which was then used for analysis.

## **Results**

This section of the paper offers a number of findings from this study. These findings should be considered as preliminary as additional analysis is still in progress. Nevertheless, these findings suggest a number of interesting results that can be used to inform state library staff and IMLS officials about how these evaluations are done.

## **Methods**

All of the 28 states' evaluation reports from the 1998-2002 period reported using multiple methods, while all but 4 (14%) from the 2002-2007 reported using multiple methods. Most evaluations (across both periods) used a combination of 3 methods (42%), while many used 2 or 4 (23% each), and a few used 1 or 5 (6% each). The methods used in the evaluations, taken across both 5-year periods, are as follows:

- Surveys of stakeholder groups (80%);
- Document analysis (57%);
- Interviews of stakeholder groups (55%);
- Focus groups (50%);
- Site visits (23%); and
- Town hall-style meetings (2%).

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups were commonly used together in evaluations: 67% of all evaluations that used surveys also used interviews, and 69% also used focus groups. Of evaluations that used interviews, 74% also used focus groups. Of evaluations that used site visits, 69% also used interviews. Surprisingly, focus groups were not commonly used with site visits.

When methodologies were used that required data to be collected from individuals (that is, all except document analysis), these data were collected from the library's staff (95% of evaluations), administrators (87%), the user community (59%), and affiliates such as boards of directors and trustees (39%).

## ***Evaluation in Various Goal Categories***

Previous research by the Rendon Group operationalizes the six goal categories articulated by the Library Services and Technology Act of 1996, by describing key phrases, sub-goals, and outcomes under each goal<sup>9</sup>. States' goals as articulated in their 5-year plans were found to correspond closely to the Rendon Group's categories of the LSTA goals. This correspondence was assessed using a simple scale: very well (27%), well (38%), poorly (27%), and not at all (8%). The authors assessed the degree of correspondence according to how closely the language of states' goals aligned with the Rendon Group's articulation of the LSTA goals.

There is a slight, though not statistically significant, difference in correspondence between the LSTA goals and states' goals from the 1998-2002 and 2003-2007 time periods: more states' goals from the 1998-2002 5-year plans corresponded well or very

well to the LSTA goals than from 2003-2007 plans, and fewer failed to correspond. This is a somewhat counter-intuitive finding. Remember that for this analysis the LSTA goals were operationalized using the Rendon Group’s articulation of those goals. The Rendon Group report was submitted to the IMLS in 2003, presumably after states’ 1998-2002 evaluation reports had already been submitted to the IMLS. When Congress reauthorized the LSTA in 2002, the IMLS modified the LSTA goals slightly, no doubt influenced in part by the findings of the Rendon report. It therefore might be expected that states’ goals from their 2003-2007 5-year plans would correspond more closely to the LSTA goals. Again, there was not a statistically significant difference between the two time periods, but it might nevertheless be in the IMLS’ interest to determine why there was a difference at all. Table 1 presents the correspondence between states’ goals and the LSTA goals, in finer detail. Because there was not a statistically significant difference between the two 5-year periods, Table 1 presents them both together.

**Table 1: Correspondence of states’ goals to the Rendon Group’s articulation of the LSTA goals, for both 1998-2002 and 2003-2007**

<b>Rendon Group Goals</b>	<b>Not well</b>	<b>Somewhat well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Very well</b>
<b>A: Establish or enhance electronic linkages among or between libraries</b>	0%	8%	29%	4%
<b>B: Electronically linking libraries with educational, social, or information services</b>	6%	12%	33%	20%
<b>C: Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks</b>	2%	18%	37%	20%
<b>D: Encouraging libraries in different areas, &amp; encouraging different types of libraries to establish consortia &amp; share resources</b>	2%	12%	24%	14%
<b>E: Paying costs for libraries to acquire or share computer systems and telecommunications technologies</b>	2%	4%	10%	12%
<b>F: Targeting library &amp; information services to persons having difficulty using a library &amp; to underserved urban &amp; rural communities, including children from families with incomes below the poverty line</b>	2%	14%	37%	35%

The most common goals that states articulated in their 5-year plans involved expanding service to underserved populations, in particular disabled and rural users. Table 2 presents the percentages of goals from states’ 5-year plans, across both 5-year periods, when mapped to the Rendon Group’s articulation of the LSTA goals. Note that these do not sum to 100%, since some states’ goals were broader than the LSTA goals, and

encompassed all or parts of multiple LSTA goals. Most states had more or fewer than six goals, so there was rarely a perfect mapping between states' goals and LSTA goals.

**Table 2: Areas of states' goals from states' 5-year plans, for both 1998-2002 and 2003-2007**

<b>Rendon Group Goals</b>	<b>Percentage of states' goals</b>
<b>A: Establish or enhance electronic linkages among or between libraries</b>	12%
<b>B: Electronically linking libraries with educational, social, or information services</b>	20%
<b>C: Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks</b>	22%
<b>D: Encouraging libraries in different areas, &amp; encouraging different types of libraries to establish consortia &amp; share resources</b>	14%
<b>E: Paying costs for libraries to acquire or share computer systems and telecommunications technologies</b>	7%
<b>F: Targeting library &amp; information services to persons having difficulty using a library &amp; to underserved urban &amp; rural communities, including children from families with incomes below the poverty line</b>	25%

### ***Goal Accomplishment***

Most states' evaluation reports included each goal articulated in the state's 5-year plan, and an indication of whether or not the goal was accomplished. If the goal was not accomplished, a statement was usually made about progress towards the accomplishment of the goal. Only 39% of goals (across all goals articulated in all 5-year plans for both time periods) were accomplished completely, though progress had been made towards the accomplishment of the goal for an additional 13%. A surprisingly high 27% of goals were reported as having not been accomplished. This last figure needs to be understood, however, in the following light: even for the goals that were not accomplished, evaluation reports discussed some progress towards the accomplishment of the goal. This is only natural: evaluators, particularly those from within state library agencies (as opposed to external consultants), may be disinclined to suggest that any goals had gone completely ignored over a 5-year period, especially since future LSTA funding in part depends on states' fulfilling their stated goals.

Interestingly, the reviewers could not determine if fully 21% of goals had been accomplished or not, or what progress had been made towards their accomplishment. This was a result of poor reporting of findings and organization of the evaluation reports, perhaps more than poor methodology on the part of the evaluators. The need for better reporting in states' evaluation reports, and the IMLS' progress towards that goal, will be discussed below.

The percentages of goals reported as being completely or partly accomplished are remarkably similar to the percentages of goals overall in states' 5-year plans. Table 3 presents these figures for both 5-year periods. This table indicates the amount of effort that states put into accomplishing goals: the most effort has been expended by states towards expanding service to underserved populations, followed by connecting libraries to the Internet and providing access to networked information resources. Interestingly, the least effort has been expended by states towards leveraging economies of scale in technology purchases and support.

**Table 3: Percentages of goals reported as completely or partly accomplished, for both 1998-2002 and 2003-2007**

<b>Rendon Group Goals</b>	<b>Percentage of goals completely or partly accomplished</b>
<b>A: Establish or enhance electronic linkages among or between libraries</b>	9%
<b>B: Electronically linking libraries with educational, social, or information services</b>	21%
<b>C: Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks</b>	20%
<b>D: Encouraging libraries in different areas, &amp; encouraging different types of libraries to establish consortia &amp; share resources</b>	16%
<b>E: Paying costs for libraries to acquire or share computer systems and telecommunications technologies</b>	8%
<b>F: Targeting library &amp; information services to persons having difficulty using a library &amp; to underserved urban &amp; rural communities, including children from families with incomes below the poverty line</b>	26%

It is not obvious why the percentages of goals reported as being completely or partly accomplished are so similar to the percentages of states' goals overall. This may simply be an indication that when they create their 5-year plans, state library agencies are accurately predicting which goals will remain important and will command resources over that 5-year period. If this is the case, that indicates that the planning processes that states employ for developing their 5-year plans are sound, and indeed may be looked to by other economic sectors as models of long-range planning. On the other hand, it may be that once goals are articulated in states' 5-year plans, this locks the state into a specific allocation of resources. More research would be required to determine what factors allow states' long-range planning to apparently be so accurate. Some factors cannot be predicted, however, as is clearly shown in Louisiana's evaluation report for 2003-2007: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 significantly affected the goals that could be accomplished, and even what goals were important.

## ***Correlating Goals to Methods***

Table 4 presents the frequencies with which different methodologies were used to investigate the accomplishment of LSTA goals. The distribution of methods within each goal closely resembles the distribution of methods employed in states' evaluations overall: the correlation between goals and methodologies is not significant. This may be an indication that the choice of a methodology for evaluating the accomplishment of goals does not reflect its appropriateness to the task. Rather, the choice of a methodology may instead reflect its popularity generally and its perceived ease of implementation. Surveys are one of the most widely-used methodologies, and are also widely – if incorrectly – perceived to be easy to develop and implement<sup>10</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that surveys are the most widely-used method across all goals. Document analysis is similarly appealing for evaluators as it does not require collecting new data, and is therefore often seen as being efficient given the time constraints evaluators typically have. Again, however, rigorous content analysis is more time-consuming and complex than it is often perceived to be. An area for further work that would be extremely useful for both the IMLS and state library agencies, is the determination of the appropriateness of different methodologies for evaluating various types of goals and outcomes.

**Table 4: Percentages of methods used to investigate the accomplishment of goals, for both 1998-2002 and 2003-2007**

	<b>Rendon Group Goals</b>					
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Survey</b>	34%	29%	28%	31%	40%	31%
<b>Interview</b>	19%	21%	21%	18%	14%	20%
<b>Document analysis</b>	25%	24%	21%	22%	14%	23%
<b>Site visit</b>	8%	8%	10%	10%	17%	10%
<b>Focus group</b>	15%	16%	18%	18%	14%	16%
<b>Town hall meeting</b>	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%

## ***Overall Quality of the Reports***

As one might expect, the readability and overall quality of the evaluation reports varied considerably from state to state. Some were quite lengthy and some were quite short; some were poorly organized and difficult to follow in their presentation; some included examples of the data collection instruments as appendices and some did not; others subcontracted the evaluation effort to consultants while some performed the evaluation in-house. None of the reports used sophisticated statistical analyses: the most extensive analysis typically was cross-tabulation tables. A number of the reports would have to be graded as a C– or lower in terms of meeting the general requirements for a quality

evaluation report that would meet the needs of the state library agency to make recommendations for improving existing programs or justifying new programs. While some did an excellent job of addressing the IMLS' recommendations for writing these reports<sup>11</sup>, a number did not.

## **Discussion**

The review of the various LSTA state evaluation reports provides numerous discussion topics that affect the overall quality and usefulness of these reports. The authors believe that the following items are some of the most important.

*Standard Terminology.* A number of states use terms such as goals, objectives, sub-goals, strategic directions, etc. in very different ways. Conducting a meta-analysis across content that uses inconsistent terminology required the authors to extrapolate these terms such that they could be better compared. A better understanding of how to use and define these terms at the state level would assist in conducting such a meta-analysis. Standardizing terminology could also make writing these reports easier, allowing for more effective and efficient longitudinal comparisons at the state level, as well as in the aggregate, across states. Further, standardization would aid the IMLS in their uses of these reports, both for informing subsequent development or revision of LSTA program goals and providing evidence of the impact of these funds when communicating with funders, library administrators and practitioners, end-users, and other stakeholders.

*Vague and Broad Goals and Objectives.* While some states did an excellent job of listing goals that were clear and objectives that were measurable, many others did not. The inclusion of poorly-conceived objectives, or objectives that were politically expedient but could not be measured easily or with validity, is an issue requiring more attention. Further, some reports include goals that were too narrow and should have been objectives, or objectives that were too broad and should have been goals. Developing clear goals and objectives is a difficult task, but there is some evaluation literature on how to do this<sup>12</sup>. As noted above, guidance on appropriate evaluation terminology may help to standardize ways in which libraries develop and then ultimately measure their goals and objectives.

*Emphasis on Surveys and Outcome-Based Evaluation.* The IMLS has spent some considerable time and effort over recent years stressing the importance of outcome based evaluation (OBE) as a means for gauging the success of library programs and services. In fact, there may be a number of additional types of program assessment approaches that should be considered for use by the state library agencies other than OBE. Moreover, the heavy dependence on surveys as opposed to other kinds of assessment techniques (e.g., log file analysis of websites) suggests the need for more innovative evaluation approaches and methods.

*Planning for Evaluation Methods and Measurement.* As far as the authors could determine, many states did not conduct a planning process to consider how to conduct an evaluation, and what types of measures would be most important and appropriate for

programs before those programs were implemented. Indeed, it was clear that “post-hoc” evaluation and determination of measures was common in these reports. Evaluations that had pre- and post- program measurements were only rarely identified.

*Simplifying the Process.* Despite the findings reported in this study, it is clear that for many state library agencies some considerable time and effort – and expense – goes into planning and implementing the 5-year evaluations. Given the mixed results identified by reviewing these reports, the IMLS should consider easier yet more powerful ways for state library agencies to demonstrate the usefulness and impact of their LSTA allocations.

*Additional Research.* The work reported here is exploratory and raises numerous additional topics that are worthy of additional research, such as:

- How do state library agencies use these evaluation findings to improve existing programs or shape new programs and services?
- To what degree do state library agencies have the evaluation capacity either to conduct evaluations in-house or to manage consultants who conduct the evaluations?
- What are the specific training needs of state library staff related to evaluation, measurement, and assessment?
- To what degree do these evaluation reports assist the state library and the IMLS to justify the LSTA program?
- What reasons can be put forth for the large number of goals that are not accomplished or for which only “progress” is made?
- What costs are associated with accomplishing the various goals?
- Do federal policies and guidelines regarding LSTA need to be revised to make the 5-year plans and evaluations more useful and have greater impact?
- How do IMLS staff assess the overall usefulness and impact of the evaluation reports, and how would that assessment compare to a similar assessment by the Chief Officers of the state library agencies?
- What quality control processes could be established – by the IMLS or other stakeholder – to assist state agencies in planning and conducting evaluations?

These are but some of the more interesting topics that deserve additional future discussion and research.

## **Conclusion**

Every state is required by law to submit 5-year LSTA evaluation reports. It is therefore in the best interests of both the IMLS and state library agencies to develop these reports such that they can be used to monitor and improve existing programs, determine the degree to which new programs are needed and what those programs might be, and demonstrate both to the federal government and other constituencies the impact and usefulness of LSTA allocations to the states.

Despite the excellent information on the IMLS website regarding the development and

submission of these 5-year plans and evaluation reports, it is clear that more training needs to be provided to a number of the state library agencies on how these reports *should* be done. Instructions and tutorials on evaluation can be found on the IMLS website, and other institutions have developed their own, including: the Information Institute at Florida State University ([www.ii.fsu.edu](http://www.ii.fsu.edu)); The University of Washington ([ibec.ischool.washington.edu/toolkit.php](http://ibec.ischool.washington.edu/toolkit.php)); The University of Central England, Birmingham ([www.evalued.bcu.ac.uk/outcomes/](http://www.evalued.bcu.ac.uk/outcomes/)); and the Florida State Library ([www.lstatoolkit.com/index.cfm](http://www.lstatoolkit.com/index.cfm)). Despite this, our investigation provides evidence that, overall, state library staff need more training in evaluation in general and in completing the LSTA evaluation reports specifically.

Space does not permit in this paper a detailed set of recommendations for revamping the entire IMLS LSTA 5-year planning and evaluation process. Such an effort, however, should be considered. For a number of state library agencies these 5-year plans and evaluations are “canned” activities that are done because they are required and the state cannot continue to receive its annual LSTA award if they are not done. It is fair to infer from our findings that some states’ evaluations are performed less to assess the impacts of funded programs in a comprehensive manner, and more in response to this funding requirement. For its part, the degree to which IMLS provides consistent and high-quality feedback to states on the quality of these reports is unclear – but would be another interesting follow-up study.

That the state evaluation reports assessed only 39% of the stated goals as completely accomplished suggests a need to review the overall process and assumptions underlying the IMLS’ procedures related to state library development of the 5-year plans and evaluation reports. While there may be many reasons for this finding, and many reasons for the wide variance in the overall quality of the reports, a more formal effort by the IMLS would be appropriate to better understand these issues and how best to improve the usefulness and impact of these reports.

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to thank Bruce Kingma for his advice and feedback on our methodology. The authors also wish to thank the State Library of North Carolina for the opportunity to work on the LSTA 5-year evaluation in North Carolina, which prompted our work on this study.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> See the area of the IMLS website containing information and resources about outcomes-based planning and evaluation: [www.imls.gov/applicants/obe.shtm](http://www.imls.gov/applicants/obe.shtm)

<sup>2</sup> Pomerantz, Jeffrey, Carolyn Hank, and Charles R. McClure. “Program Evaluation of the Library Services and Technology Act Plan For Implementation in North Carolina, 2003-2007.” Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 2007. Retrieved from: [http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/lsta/LSTA\\_Eval\\_Report\\_2007.pdf](http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/lsta/LSTA_Eval_Report_2007.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services. “State Allotments for Fiscal Years 2004-2008.” Washington DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d. Retrieved from: <http://www.ims.gov/programs/allotments.shtm>

<sup>4</sup> Kingma, Bruce, Joseph F. Shubert, and Amanda Yeoh. “The Impact of Federal Funding on State Library Agencies: The LSCA to LSTA Transition.” Washington, DC: U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2002: 6.

<sup>5</sup> Holton, Barbara, Patricia O’Shea, Cindy Sheckells, Suzanne Dorinski, and Michael Freeman. “Library Statistics Program: State Library Agency Report for FY 2006.” Washington DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2007: 8.

<sup>6</sup> Holton, et al.: 9.

<sup>7</sup> Museum and Library Services Act (Title II of P.L. 94–462). 2002: 5. Retrieved from: <http://www.ims.gov/pdf/1996.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Museum and Library Services Act: 9.

<sup>9</sup> The Rendon Group. “National Profile: Analyses of the Five-Year Evaluations submitted to the Institute of Museum and Library Services by the State Library Administrative Agencies under the Grants to States program of the Library Services and Technology Act.” Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2003: 26.

<sup>10</sup> Dillman, Don A., Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services. “Purposes of OBE.” Washington DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d. Retrieved from: <http://www.ims.gov/applicants/overview.shtm>; Institute of Museum and Library Services. “Guidelines for 5-Year Evaluation Report.” Washington DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Patton, Michael Q. Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1996.