

NILPPA

National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment

Briefing Packet

Stakeholder Planning Meeting

May 8-9, 2014

Kinzie Hotel

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Developing a Research Framework: A Briefing Paper Overview

The American Library Association (ALA) Public Programs Office (PPO) has received grant funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to shape the direction of a comprehensive research agenda and implementation plan to study the outcomes of library public programming on a national level. Once implemented, the research framework designed through this assessment will evaluate the impact of programming initiatives, identify successes, models and best practices, and define new opportunities and directions for the field.

The primary goal of the assessment and planning phase (referred to as “NILPPA”) is to determine the approach to research that will ensure that all library stakeholders will have the breadth of information they need to make policy and investment decisions that leverage the infrastructure and expertise of libraries in the area of public programming. To that end, secondary goals include: to examine trends emerging from recent studies; to shape a general framework and common language for describing public programming in libraries; to identify gaps in current knowledge and practice, and to develop the research strategy to serve the field.

An initial stakeholder meeting in Philadelphia (January 24, 2014) reviewed the current history of library programs, identified research needs, opportunities, and challenges, and began to outline the central components of a research agenda. Workshop participants sought to answer key questions, such as: What individuals or groups experience the impacts of public programming? What outcomes should libraries expect to achieve with target audiences? What are core elements or principles of program design that are critical to achieving those outcomes? What impact do public programs have on a library’s identity and the perception of the nations’ libraries? What are the goals and objectives that guide public programming in libraries? Download the full report here:

http://www.ala.org/programming/sites/ala.org/programming/files/content/Philadelphia%20Summary%20Report%202014%2004%2018_Final.pdf.

The workshop participants acknowledged that changes in society are influencing the nature of public programming. These changes include growth in intergenerational learning, self-directed learning, increasing attention to the needs of diverse multicultural communities, community relationships, the scaling back of financial resources in social and cultural services, technology-aided learning, and the ubiquity of on-demand online resources. The workshop conversation recognized the important role libraries serve filling gaps in the education system and strengthening the social fabric of their communities through enriched learning opportunities. It identified the current nature of public programming in libraries while also drawing from current literature and expertise on learning, evaluation, and research.

This briefing document serves as an introduction to key issues that will be explored by the stakeholders attending the Chicago NILPPA meeting (May 8-9, 2014). The Chicago workshop will engage participants in small workgroup discussions that seek to articulate the field’s research/evaluation needs and prioritize the critical research questions that should be addressed by a national audience. The workgroups will strive to clarify critical research questions, give them priority, and outline the steps necessary to move the agenda from conception to implementation. This briefing paper includes sections conceptualizing the challenge (identifying what we know and where we are headed) and outlines possible methodological considerations and approaches to be further discussed during the workshop.

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Conceptualizing the Challenge

Identifying What We Know

An effort has been made to document the current state of the field of library programming through an analysis of materials found in the ALA archives and through feedback from those currently working in the field – through a nationwide professional opinion survey and the Philadelphia stakeholder meeting. The opinions of programming librarians reflecting upon their own efforts generated part of the data used as the basis for a meta-analysis of the current state of public programming. Together, these sources of input paint a picture of what we already know and identify the essential issues that must be addressed through research strategy design.

A Shared Definition for “Program”?

What is meant by the term “program”? According to IMLS (2013), “a program is any planned event which introduces the group attending to any of the broad range of library services or activities or which directly provides information to participants. Programs may cover use of the library, library services, or library tours. Programs may also provide cultural, recreational, or educational information, often designed to meet a specific social need.”

Programs can be held on- or off-site, sponsored or co-sponsored by the library. Programs sponsored by other groups that use library facilities are excluded from the definition. Library activities delivered on a one-to-one basis are also excluded, such as one-to-one literacy tutoring, homework assistance, and mentoring activities (IMLS, 2013).

Meta-Analysis of ALA Programming Archives

The ALA Public Programs Office (PPO) has served as a central repository for the collection of data about the status of public programming in libraries. Regular data collection has been undertaken about programs from libraries that receive support through ALA initiatives, although the format of such data reporting has been modified over the years. NewKnowledge staff visited the ALA offices in Chicago and the ALA archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign during Fall 2013 to review all records related to supported programs, including annual reports, grant applications, reports on impact, and other materials, supplemented by the ALA PPO’s online data records and public documents. A meta-analysis report documents ALA’s state of knowledge about library public programming, organized around evidence of types of *programming*, *audiences*, intended *outcomes*, and *impact*. Key findings from that report are synthesized here. The full report is available to participants online:

<http://www.ala.org/programming/sites/ala.org/programming/files/content/Meta%20Analysis%20Final%20Report%202014%2004%2022%281%29.pdf>.

Program Types

To undertake the content analysis, NewKnowledge generally grouped programs according to several main categories: author programs, discussion programs, traveling exhibits, and summer programming. Following this grouping, the review of the ALA PPO archival documentation performed confirmed the wide range of programming described in a previous study (Wilcox Johnson, 1999) but may suggest that these definitions may have expanded in scope. Programming types documented in ALA PPO archives include exhibits, films, music, workshops, crafts, public forums, interactive dialogue, lectures, performance, storytelling, book clubs, digital programming, and distance learning. Some of the programs could be described as “cultural,” featuring themes from the humanities, sciences, and creative arts, while others may represent training or capacity-building efforts.

Proposals submitted by libraries to the ALA PPO reviewed for this study frequently provided evidence that cultural programming at libraries is often developed in conjunction with community and civic engagement programs or other community-wide efforts. This seemed particularly true for libraries that characterized themselves as being located in communities with high levels of ethnic diversity. This seemed to address an identified community need and an active desire to engage local groups.

Library Audiences

According to IMLS (2011), attendance at public library programs continues to increase, with 89 million people attending 3.81 million programs in 2011, representing a 32.3% increase in attendance and 46.7% increase in the number of programs since 2004. Who are the people that make up these audiences – not only at public libraries, but all library types nationwide?

Few artifacts in the ALA PPO archives are explicit about intended target audiences, but certain inferences can be made. The term “audience” refers to a specific group of people organized according to a feature they have in common, i.e., a particular demographic marker such as age. When several of these specific audiences intersect and are considered together, they become known as a community. The concept of community-as-programming-audience is in line with the IMLS strategic plan (2012-2016): “Healthy, thriving, sustainable communities need institutions that strengthen civic life, understand and respond to community needs, and provide common experiences that knit community members together through common experiences and shared interests” (p. 8).

Many possible audience segmentations exist. For example, individuals, experts or amateurs, with an interest in a given topic; families, together in intergenerational groups or separated into children, teens, parents, etc.; social service providers and caregivers; educators and students; public officials and political leadership; language or ethnic minority subgroups; new immigrants and English-language learners; and other community stakeholders or partners.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to begin the segmentation of programming audiences is at the broadest level, according to library type. The audience for library programming depends to a great extent on the type of library that is designing, hosting or implementing a given program. Public programs are by no means limited to public libraries. In fact, programming librarians at academic libraries consider the relationship between campus and community to be at the core of their work.

Audience segmentation also occurs by age. A professional opinion survey of programming librarians found that too much focus on children’s programming may come at the expense of older youth/adults. One theme that emerged was the need to expand adult programming and demonstrate the impact of that programming. Some librarians have felt that their efforts have been disproportionate to the make up of their audiences, noting that adults want to come to the library for their own programs, not just to attend events with their children. A shift to increasing adult programming has been well received by library audiences, but evidence of impact is still lacking. The current IMLS strategic plan, *Creating a Nation of Learners*, indicates the essential function of libraries as promoters of *life-wide* learning. Through public programming, these institutions serve as essential and trusted components of the nation’s learning ecosystem, addressing a need for learning over the course of a lifetime, at every age.

Intergenerational audiences comprised of children, youth, teenagers, young adults, parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have become increasingly important. Increasingly, households where both parents work outside the home is becoming the norm. This results in more use of unrelated caregivers as well as increased desire to spend limited family time together. Libraries are beginning to consider what programming would look like for these audiences

collectively, instead of targeting more limited and homogenous groups of learners. Families often seek to create memorable experiences and learn things they can continue to do together. The intergenerational audience usually has its own, distinct agenda; it is likely to seek activities in which everyone is engaged in conversation and exchange. Learning is an interrelated and iterative process between the parties involved.

One core characteristic of the knowledge age is that audiences are increasingly segmented. The idea that “one size fits all” is no longer relevant in an increasingly individualized and customized world. Consequently, programming librarians are developing programs for more and more specialized audiences, whose interests and needs are highly diverse. Program content and format are designed for the audiences who are most likely to experience meaningful impact from program implementation and execution. Content varies considerably from current affairs to reading clubs, from skill-based learning to dynamic forums. Each is designed to serve a specific audience group. The upcoming research and evaluation planning must address the relationship between intended program outcomes and their specific audiences.

Intended Programming Outcomes

Intended programming outcomes can be divided into two primary categories: those that focus on *knowledge acquisition*, where the target audience is expected to learn something, and those that relate to *skill-building*, enabling people to do something.

Acquiring information as an intended programming outcome can relate to areas of local interest or to broad national themes. Programming librarians noted that public programs related to local history had the capacity to increase awareness about library resources and the library’s role in the rich history of the community. Broader, nationwide themes found in the ALA PPO archives may be divided into four major areas: American political history, civil rights and multiculturalism, health and science, and general humanities.

The ALA PPO archive was also reviewed for programs delivered since 1987 that aligned with IMLS’ definitions of for 21st century skills (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009). Many program offerings appeared to touch on the learning and innovation skills outlined in the IMLS report, rather than the information and media literacies or life and career skills that are the focus of other library services. Most of the funded programs reviewed in this analysis seemed to link most closely with advancing critical thinking skills as part of public discussions or ability to apply historical or contemporary content with life experience through discussion groups and exhibitions. It may be possible to consider how programs advance skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, enhance visual and information literacy, analyzing and problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, adaptability, creativity, personal and social responsibility, initiative, and self-direction. These skills and abilities are increasingly considered the core needs for a literate person in the 21st century, but further study would be required to determine if public programs contribute to these outcomes.

One additional aspect of intended programming outcomes relates to the public perception of libraries. Good programming should be inclusive of diverse audiences, relevant to current needs and interests, and culturally responsive. This, in turn, shapes the perception of libraries as being in service of the whole of the community. Excellence in public programs, reaching a wide variety of audiences, and working in collaboration with others, adds to the public perception of the library as an essential public service. It produces an image of libraries as catalysts for boldly addressing important issues.

Findings from the Professional Opinion Survey

A nationwide professional opinion survey was distributed through the ALA PPO's listserv of programming librarians in December 2013 (N=3,916). 275 programming librarians (7% response rate) from across the USA offered descriptions of their hopes for what could be accomplished through a comprehensive national research agenda designed to advance understanding of the aggregate impacts from public programming. The survey demonstrated that there is widespread desire for the proposed research agenda with some clear goals for results.

The perceived worth of empirical data

Librarians asserted that there is already evidence of impact from public programming. They know this intuitively, yet desire hard numbers and statistics to demonstrate the value to governments and funding entities. They felt that programming outcomes and impacts are particularly difficult to measure, but felt that concrete and objective data would be most useful for communicating with decision-makers and elected officials to show the impact of budget support. Participants felt that documented benefits include use of findings by local, state, and national library advocates. In the words of one librarian, programming would benefit from a way to quantify the qualitative feedback.

While the advantage of quantitative data is perceived as useful for securing library funding, librarians were less convinced that numerical measures such as attendance rates were an effective measure of program success. Attendance, in particular, is seen as a poor reflection of the true value of public programming. New metrics need to combine qualitative and quantitative aspects, and, above all, be feasible for libraries to use.

Programming Impact

Programming librarians universally asserted that measuring impact is critically needed. In the professional opinion survey, librarians repeatedly mentioned the need for data that would justify additional resources and help improve library services. Yet despite this assertion, no standard process for assessment exists, and demonstrating impact continues to be a largely aspirational goal. Currently, approaches rely too heavily on anecdotal evidence or are limited to quantitative measures like attendance, both of which fall short of gauging authentic impact. When asked about impact, librarians cited very informal data-gathering methods, such as overhearing comments made to library staff: As guests mingled and chatted after each event, many took the opportunity to share their appreciation of the program with staff members. Librarians demonstrated resistance to using attendance numbers, since having fewer participants may actually result in more engaged and participatory dialog. Yet measuring attendance continues to be the low-hanging fruit, "one of the few objective measures available to gauge impact," and low turnouts are of continued concern to programming librarians in the absence of other qualitative impact measurements.

A desire to see how they measure up

Participants felt that library programming does not happen in isolation, but rather is part of a growing national community. Many noted the value of ALA-sponsored programs and other national initiatives. Yet most participants commented on the need to assess locally-designed programs as part of cohorts of libraries of similar size or type in different locations. Librarians expressed a desire to cultivate a better understanding of current activities of others across the field at large and develop a systematic way to compare their programming experiences.

Increase the perceived value of their work

Most respondents, irrespective of their library type, felt that public programs have been historically overlooked and undervalued. They hoped the NILPPA effort would increase understanding of why programming is essential, both for

public audiences/potential users and funders. In some places, communities have invested time and money in renovations or new library buildings and hope research findings will demonstrate the value of this investment.

Cost-benefit analysis

Not surprisingly, there was mention of limited resources or budget cuts that increase the culture of accountability for allocation of funds to programming. There were desires for metrics that would provide clarity in the assessment of highest return on investment of time and money in programs that could be applied across diverse settings.

Effective means of disseminating findings

There was a high level of desire for clarity in the systematic dissemination of research and analysis of public programs.

Results of the First Advisory Meeting

The ALA PPO facilitated a one-day workshop on January 24, 2014, at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia. In attendance were key advisors for the NILPPA project. This group included ALA staff and programming librarians who are knowledgeable about the state of public programming in libraries.

The group endeavored to describe the elements of successful program design. In addition to selecting appropriate and desired topics, successful programming requires sensitivity to programming principles, such as format strengths and weaknesses, language use, level of audience expertise, and unintended discrimination. All must be balanced and understood in order to accomplish the intended goals and objectives.

These elements include developing programs that may be:

- User-oriented, programs that may be identified by user requests and needs;
- Collaborative, involving participation of a range of stakeholders from a variety of community perspectives, often to explore local problems or new opportunities;
- Accessible to various literacy levels;
- Varied in the nature of activity, from participatory and hands-on to listening and responding;
- Reflective of a community's diversity;
- Closely correlated with specific library resources;
- Built upon themes that are multi-dimensional and open-ended;
- Founded in equity, assuring they do not exacerbate social disparities; *and*
- Reflective of the ethical standards of libraries and librarians to serve freely and impartially.

Designing a framework for any research agenda requires first identifying criteria for measurement. Such criteria are the “book ends” to the goals and objectives established for each program. They reflect the nature of the targeted audience and the implications of incorporating the kinds of library principles addressed above. Program goals demonstrate the same level of diversity as audiences and program formats. The NLPPA advisors identified the following as among the frequent goals and objectives:

- Get people to read;
- Get people to think;
- Stimulate conversation;
- Validate people's ideas and interests;
- Provide a sense of belonging;
- Stimulate interest in new content;
- Teach life skills;
- Teach application of technology to life skills;

- Open people to other perspectives;
- Provide transformational opportunities;
- Give people a voice;
- Provide information to elected officials;
- Encourage problem-solving;
- Increase curiosity;
- Introduce new resources;
- Raise excitement about diversity;
- Cultivate critical thinking skills; *and*
- Enhance public awareness of library professionalism.

The group also noted that some goals are internal to the libraries themselves, such as:

- Raise the credibility/significance of, and commitment to, public programs within a library;
- Raise public awareness of the library's commitment to serve as a forum for public conversation;
- Build relationships with other community resources; *and*
- Attract funding from diverse sources.

In sum, characterizing the assessment thus far has been the persistence of anecdotal information about public programming in libraries. There is scant research that evaluates impact or proposes models for best practices across the field, aside from the extensive efforts made to assess the impacts that accrue from summer reading programs. Assessing the state of library programming on a national level will increase understanding of how library programs increase broad public access to knowledge and foster support for lifelong learners across diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Missing from these analyses are insights into how public programming decisions are made, especially those that are designed to respond to community needs. Despite the frequent mention of addressing community needs as an overarching goal, it is difficult to see such a process in action. What we can ascertain so far does not reveal a consistent approach to the selection of themes and titles or community input. The overall lack of information on program selections, along with the paucity of evidence of public impact, seriously impacts the library community's needs for best practices and fresh guidelines.

Where We Are Headed? Implications for Research and Assessment

As we move forward, it is essential to keep in mind certain observations and lessons learned. These considerations will, no doubt, shape the research plan as it continues to unfold in Chicago.

A Changing Learning Environment

The issues identified in this report as significant topics for the discussion of future programming are almost all drawn from the concept of the world in a new learning age. The widely used term *lifelong learning* is not a new concept, but it has taken on a new urgency and importance in the last few decades. The driving force behind that urgency is the speed and all-pervasive nature of change in the modern era. Change is not a short-term trend, but a state of being in the 21st century, and it demands human adaptation in most aspects of life, especially in the need to become learners across a lifetime. To stay abreast of change, rethink threatened values, make sound decisions, participate in our communities, families and nation, develop new skills, and strengthen our own identities and self-worth, there is nothing more imperative than learning.

Most learning in this intense environment will be learner-driven, fueled by personal motivation and styled to meet individual needs. It is already estimated that most of us gain only 9% of our education in formal learning environments, i.e., schools. The bureaucracy in many public school systems is based on concepts developed to address a mid-twentieth century industrialization model rather than a new knowledge age that is less tied to manufacturing or urbanization (Ravitch, 2000). More and more responsibility for providing resources, models, and access to learning is falling outside of the school system; we are observing unique changes in how life is being pursued in rural and exurban areas, and communities that face unique environmental or social pressures. In addition, the extraordinary developments in all kinds of technologies are transforming how we experience social, societal, economic, and community life. Although none of what is written here is new to any of us, what is most profound are the challenges, opportunities, and imperatives for the learning institutions in our communities – the libraries, museums, media organizations, and others – to assess the implications of all of these changes as they relate to each institution's practices and public responsibilities.

As noted, informal, self-directed learning is very different from the formal lessons of classrooms and curricula. It is notable for its personalization. It is often characterized by a sense of immediacy and relevancy. It is intentionally sought out and intrinsically motivated. Such personal motivations may be to obtain new skills or information, to take on more responsibility for one's own wellbeing, or to become more closely engaged with others. Meeting the needs of the new learner requires an understanding of his/her learning needs. Consequently, one key consideration in planning a research agenda is determining the most effective methods for assessing the audience's learning needs.

Implicit in the new learning environment is the need to cultivate critical thinking – in both formal and informal educational environments. Over the course of the past decade, a national dialogue about the importance of 21st Century thinking skills is changing the focus of education. In an age of rapid change and an environment glutted with information, it is increasingly important to have the skills to sort, analyze, judge, adapt, and recombine that information. Today's lifelong learners are seeking a range of new literacies, including information and media literacy, along with civic, health, and environmental literacies. Creativity and problem-solving, innovation, and skill at collaboration are becoming the most desired skills in many environments. To meet the demands of a complex society, learners must be able to work across disciplines, to take initiative and assume personal responsibility. The teacher of the past is

increasingly the facilitator of the present, working with students to guide the development of their thinking skills. How will continuing education, formal or informal, respond in the development of new programs?

A Changing Technology Environment

Libraries have already stepped to the fore to provide access and training in the use of new technologies (Orick, 2000). This well-known challenge to changing roles (ie: Orick, 2000) is likely to continue as the new programs, applications, and technologies continue to emerge. Research, including the seminal studies led by Drs. José-Marie Griffiths and Donald King on the *Future of Librarians in the Workforce*, determined that the *personal* role of the librarian in providing these services is essential – a service that will continue to have implications in educational programming for libraries. In addition, the access to information provided through technology is one of the driving forces shaping the new learner. This new learner can tailor-make his/her searches to personal needs. At the same time, however, the social conditions of learning are harder to maintain in an era when group problem-solving and collaboration are touted as important ways to work. Consequently, opportunities for people to learn together may be important in future programming.

Combining Learning and Technology in a New Model for Cities

Across the globe, cities are being redefined, taking on such labels as Smart Cities, Digital Cities, Legible Cities, and, quite prominently in Europe, Learning Cities. The definitions of these terms are quite fluid, but what they have in common is a commitment to building partnerships and networks across the city that enhance the quality of life for its citizens. When IMLS envisioned collaborations between museums and libraries, and ultimately introduced its program entitled *Museums, Libraries and the 21st Century Learner*, the agency was responding to the new demands of the learning age, the impact of technology, and the potential of collaboration. The concept of a Learning City expands that early initiative by recognizing that every city has numerous informal learning institutions that, joined together, would create an unparalleled learning environment. Not only does the Learning City concept envision the city as campus, it also defines ways to bring neighborhoods together, support more participatory government, and create many routes toward learning for all. Although transforming the whole of the city sounds daunting, considering program partnerships one at a time and defining collaboration as a civic virtue are possibilities that hold great promise.

Developing the Framework

Public programming has increasingly become an essential service of libraries of all kinds and sizes, at the heart of the library's mission. As one workshop participant expressed in Philadelphia, "programming is not something added on to what we do, it is what we do."

Behind this statement are a great many questions about who is doing the programming, what specific training they have had, how programming decisions are made, and, ultimately, what is the personal, social or political "value-added" of library programming? What impact does it have on the many audiences it serves? Thus, as cultural programming has grown substantially, so too has the need for a comprehensive research program that will provide practitioners with access to best practices and to guidelines for new programming opportunities.

A research strategy is designed for the systematic collection and analysis of data in order to meaningfully explore a phenomenon. It prioritizes short-term and aggregates logical short-term goals as steps toward answering larger and more elusive questions. In many cases, a research strategy will consider methodological considerations as a way of developing an effective framework for undertaking a series of research projects that can most efficiently lead toward the long-term goals. While a great many research methods can help build a solid base of research, the efforts being undertaken for the National Impacts of Library Public Programs Assessment will seek to identify a strategy that can best describe how public programming contributes to society.

To see an example of a research framework that provides a structure for institutional and multi-institutional studies as part of a field involving visitors and community stakeholders, see Fraser et al (2010) *Framework For Zoo and Aquarium Social Science Research*, developed with the Association for Zoos and Aquariums:

<http://www.newknowledge.org/resources/publications-online-tools/> or download directly from:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/7o0x64r3qsia3qj/AZA%20Research%20Framework_2011%2003%2020.pdf.

Defining Impact

Central to the ability to determine the most effective strategy is first describing what is meant by *impact*. It is recognized that this definition will continue to be refined and negotiated at the Chicago meeting, but the following first exploration is provided as food-for-thought in advance of that meeting:

Whereas *outcomes* are thought of as more immediate changes in program participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, or other measurable indicators, impact is usually associated with longer-term consequences – either intended or unintended – that occur within organizations, communities, or systems as a result of program activities. (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014). Impact is closely tied to notions of *quality of life* – such as improved social status or living conditions. Many organizations have defined impact as it relates to their work. For example:

An impact evaluation assesses changes in the well-being of individuals, households, communities or firms that can be attributed to a particular project, program or policy. The central impact evaluation question is what would have happened to those receiving the intervention if they had not in fact received the program... Impact evaluation is aimed at providing feedback to help improve the design of programs and policies. In addition to providing for improved accountability, impact evaluations are a tool for dynamic learning, allowing policymakers to improve ongoing programs and ultimately better allocate funds across programs (World Bank, 2014).

In Philadelphia, the group asked: Is setting up “measurable impact goals” sufficient to gauge the full impact of library programming? Could this approach alone actually be counterproductive to encouraging dynamic and organic programs? For example, how could we measure the deeper goal of stimulating memorable intellectual experiences? To what degree does goal-setting hamper spontaneity, improvisation, and dynamic shifts in thought? Are there alternatives to traditional evaluation methodology that could document changes in group dynamics and intellectual processes at work? Would it be appropriate/useful to embed a trained observer in the audience? What kinds of goals can be quickly assessed and which require longer periods and more complex follow up? These questions should continue to be addressed as the planning process moves forward. They may lead to the possibility of designing a suite of research/evaluation methodologies to provide a more comprehensive picture.

The group further discussed the implications of the many variables that are at work in defining and delivering library programs. One is that of training for the position of library programmer. What are the competencies that are necessary to be an effective program director? How much, if any, attention is given to this aspect of library work in Library and Information Graduate Studies Programs? Who determines the resources that are directed toward adult cultural programming, and are there best practices that could help decision-making in individual libraries? The discussants suggested that defining competencies and measurement models more specifically might help develop an across-the-profession consistency.

Examples of these deep-level impacts include:

- Indicators that might document a deepening of the trust and reciprocity happening between citizens;
- A palpable change in an individual's or group's thinking;
- A growing sense of confidence in oneself;
- The generation of new questions;
- A recognition that something in a program “pushed one's mind.”

There exists concern about the enormous complexity of measuring the depth of impacts and the tendency to design for specific outputs that lend themselves to easier assessment. Participants in the Chicago workshop may want to consider how to determine an appropriate range of indicators that captures both outcomes and impacts of library programming, and how to distinguish between the two.

Methodological Considerations and Questions

The following section on purposes and uses of a research agenda opens up exploration of key questions: Who will use the findings of the research? How will the buy-in and cooperation of libraries be assured? How can community issues and partnerships become part of the study? How will a research process relate to the core principles and ethics of the library profession?

The Purposes and Uses of a National Research Agenda

The purpose of this project is to ensure that all library stakeholders have access to information they need to make strategic policy and investment decisions that will further leverage the infrastructure and expertise that flow from libraries' public programs. That statement is accompanied by a shared understanding of what benefits accrue to the recipients of library public programming and the communities where these people live.

What kind of evidence is necessary to validate the impact of programs?

Evaluation is a powerful management tool. It can provide internal governance and management with information useful to make budget, hiring, and resource-allocation decisions. Consequently, great care must go into determining what kind of evidence will validate any reporting of program outcomes. Participants raised concerns that evaluation not focus on head counts or cost analysis based on attendance. They cited that librarians traditionally spend as much time as necessary with a user to help them resolve a research question. Programs, like other library services, must be considered for their value and change impact, not solely focused on numbers served.

How might libraries be grouped to support national research? How might a cooperative effort be achieved?

There are many possible ways to segment libraries. There are an estimated 120,096 libraries of all kinds in the United States today. Public libraries have the widest user base and include users characterized by a range of demographic markers. Academic libraries typically undertake programming related to undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, institutional affiliates, and those in geographic proximity to the institution. The users of school libraries include students, teachers, staff, parents, and the surrounding community. Finally, special libraries (such as corporate, medical, law, and religious institutions) have a limited audience that is usually closely related to the library's mission and purpose. Libraries can also be grouped according to the size of the population they serve or their geographic region.

Conversation in Philadelphia explored how to assure widespread buy-in across the library field to both the process and the use of results. ALA staff spoke to their commitment to keeping the planning process and eventual research implementation as fully transparent as possible so that libraries are well informed of the progress and purposes of the project before their participation is requested. The group noted the practical issues as well. For example, it will be necessary to create research tools that are scalable and adaptable to different sizes and types of libraries. Libraries must see the benefit to themselves of participating in a national study. Thus data collected must resonate with the needs of various library types. In addition, a project that is considered burdensome to staff is not likely to receive much support.

A number of suggestions explored the application of technology to the process. Could a uniform survey, for example, be web-based and widely accessible? Could ALA support a central portal where results are submitted and coordinated to provide consistent national data? Could there be a menu of options that could be tailored to meet specific needs? The question of how to use technology most effectively should be explored by the Chicago stakeholder group.

How might libraries interface with their communities in addressing programming needs?

A core consideration that emerged at several points in the Philadelphia workshop focused on the library's relationship to its community. This issue took on several dimensions throughout the day. One important consideration was how the library identified and addressed community needs. One participant asked: To what extent can the library serve as the catalyst to emerging community issues and create a safe and supportive environment for them to surface and be discussed?

Another community-connected theme that emerged focused on how community collaboration added greater dimension to programming topics and results, bringing fresh voices to conversations and adding even more specificity to targeted audiences. Solid and shared programming further helps define the community as a desirable place to be, an environment where multiple voices are invited and listened to. By inviting critical discourse and promoting equity, libraries help create a concept of community that is welcoming and tolerant.

How might funders & policymakers use the data?

Are there discrepancies between what outside stakeholders and library staff may want to hear? Is there a tendency to distort or select data categories because of what funders want to hear? Some discussion in Philadelphia focused on using the research data to educate stakeholders on the most important values of library services. Others noted that collaboration with the community is valuable in aligning goals. This question is especially important in validating the role and position of the library in the community. How might libraries reposition themselves and become more visible to the whole of the community by using the positive outcomes of research?

How might research support best practices in library programming?

The research agenda will need to include methodology that captures components of best practices across a range of program types. Some discussion explored issues of who directed and owned programming, how programming decisions were made, and what competencies were regarded as essential for library programmers. The research framework will need to include ways to assess process and outcomes, as well as impacts.

A Logic Model for NILPPA

A logic model provides a framework that links public programming with its intended outcomes. Creating a logic model for public programming impact will provide the community with a way of visualizing various impacts that might accrue over the short term and how these impacts aggregate over the long term at a level of social import.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2014), often cited for their *Logic Model Development Guide*, aligns the model with their core mission: “To help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” The design of the logic model is based on the Kellogg Foundation’s efforts to positively influence a large number of diverse social programs, creating a need for a widely-applicable model.

Logic models are useful tools for organizing and describing the planning, implementation, and outcomes of programs so that each component can be evaluated and outcomes optimized. By identifying the underlying ideas of a library’s programming, and connecting them to its outcomes, any given program can be assessed in a measurable way and subsequently modified. A logic model enables programming staff to think about and plan their programs in a way that promotes communication about objectives and necessitates close observation.

Using a logic model will provide a clear roadmap for programming staff, helping them track their own progress through a project, from the initial conception through to its conclusion. The process is divided into distinct stages that connect to the greater goals of the program. Using a logic model for programming enables learning from, and improving, multiple and specific aspects of the program, yet also serves to evaluate public programs on a comprehensive scale.

Ultimately, developing a logic model will allow ALA PPO to create clear metrics for assessing the value of public programming and help them better support libraries nationwide as new programs are created and implemented.

Figure 1 offers an overview of the constituent parts of a logic model that could be adapted and applied to an assessment of public programming. Workshop participants in Chicago will be encouraged to think about the respective parts of a useful model and how one could be used by ALA PPO to improve programming impacts for individuals, groups and society.

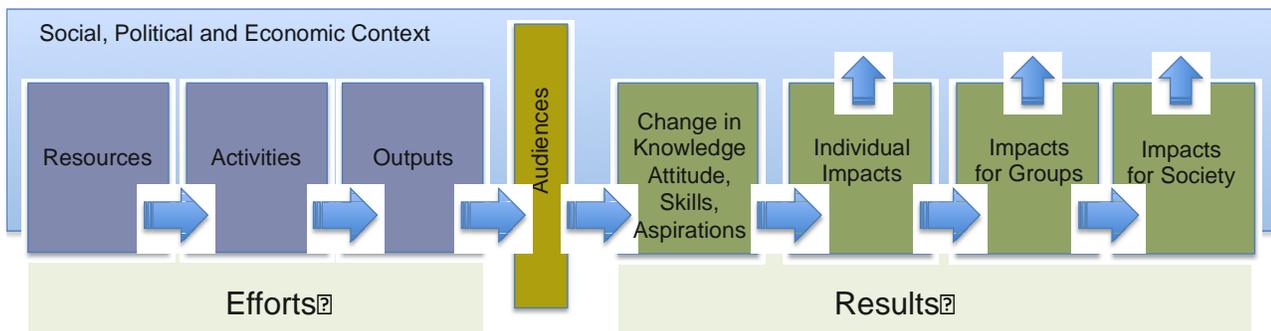


Figure 1: Example of Components of a Logic Model for Library Programs

An Overview of Some Research Methods

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative research methods rely on numerical data to calculate statistics and provide insight into a research topic, enabling researchers to empirically look at data and validate qualitative assumptions. Through an attempt to eliminate researcher bias, quantitative researchers strive to examine participants rather than interact with them (Creswell, 1994).

Traditionally, quantitative analysis of circulation records has helped libraries develop or optimize their collections. Quantitative methods can be applied to measure the performance of public programming by comparing time spent on planning and implementation with measurable outcomes, such as increase in circulation of relevant collections, positive user feedback, and other signs of “success.” Furthermore, quantitative data can provide useful, easy-to-digest data for local, state, and national governments and funding agencies and provide a basis for establishing metrics for further inquiry. Quantitative methods may constitute a straightforward approach to data collection but lack a way of truly gauging the overall value of libraries in communities.

Questions to Consider

- What quantitative assessments are already in use at libraries?
- How can technology assist in shared quantitative data collection and/or aggregation to reduce the burden on library staff and benefit the field as a whole?

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research prioritizes the meaning ascribed to social or human phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods use textual, non-numerical data to answer “how” and “why” research questions, capturing the views and opinions of dynamic participants. To collect qualitative data, researchers must interact with the research participants, a connection that can facilitate the discovery of new perspectives and reveal insight hidden to quantitative researchers (Creswell, 1994). Bryman (2004) contends that “the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections” (p. 279). Rather than try to isolate and control variables, its goal is to understand multiple perspectives that permit complex analysis. It is an expansive rather than reductionist approach: “Researchers are bound not by tight cause-and-effect relationships among factors, but rather by identifying the complex interactions of factors in any situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). Qualitative methods are frequently used to complement quantitative research methods, as each approach has strengths and weaknesses.

A library may find that their programming staff spend long hours planning new programs with low attendance. While quantitative research would indicate that such programming may not be a worthwhile pursuit, qualitative methods, such as a survey with open-ended question feedback, may reveal unexpected value for program attendees. Furthermore, qualitative analysis can make known nuanced thoughts and opinions about ways to modify or improve current programs, beyond merely indicating satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a given experience.

Questions to Consider

- What qualitative assessments are already being used by libraries? How could data collection procedures be more efficient?
- How can qualitative and quantitative approaches be effectively combined?

Constructivism

In a constructivist approach to research, social phenomena are understood as examined, constructed, and implicitly interpreted, by the participants themselves (Bryman, 2004). It recognizes that social structures “shape the identities and interests of actors” (McCandless, 2007, p. 113). Constructivism is based upon the idea that learning involves constructing meaning according to one’s experience and observations, then linking new information to prior knowledge.

As Creswell (2009) states, “Social Constructivists hold the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 234). Subjective meaning is “negotiated” by individuals through interaction with one another and with socio-cultural norms, rather than “imprinted” on them (Creswell, 2007).

Questions to Consider

- How might a constructivist approach become useful for engaging in research related to library programs?

Case Study Research

Yin’s (2003) detailed handbook *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* promotes case study research as a comprehensive research strategy, calling it an “all-encompassing method” – one that includes design logic, data collection procedures and approaches to analyzing data (p. 14). Case studies can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory, allowing researchers a great deal of flexibility in the design process. Case study research is highly responsive to, and reflective of, contextual considerations, viewing data as embedded in a particular social context.

Using a case study approach may allow for discovery about the unique culture of individual libraries nationwide through designing a framework that could be applied at the level of each participating library. A general framework can be developed and then customized by each library to suit specific needs and parameters. Case studies are useful both as in-depth approaches to understanding a single phenomenon (or “case”), and as a useful tool for comparing/contrasting (in a multi-case study).

A case study approach addresses the issue of “grain” – data will be collected locally but then used to infer meaning at the state/regional/national level. The knowledge that results from understanding a specific case (successes and failures, what does and doesn’t work) can then be applied to other cases as a way of determining what is generalizable across a larger cross-section of libraries or library systems.

Questions to Consider

- Can we consider how a suite of detailed case studies might be applied to different library types or strata in order to more fully elaborate how program experiences have impact in their communities at a sociological or political level?
- What information generated by a collection of case studies from across a diverse nation and its territories might be most valued by those planning programs? Most useful for the field as a whole?
- How could a national effort benefit by common reporting of critical case studies to support more generalizable questions about the future of library programs?

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic studies observe research participants in a natural setting or context and explore how those participants' thoughts and actions are influenced by their environment. Ethnographic researchers may be embedded within the same system as research participants. Ethnographic studies can raise awareness of repressive or counterproductive forces in environments. Using this process requires flexibility to adapt or change course as new findings emerge about the context of the research topic and participants (Creswell, 1994).

Ethnographic studies may be particularly useful in library communities characterized by changing or newly emerging demographics or library communities that serve marginalized populations. By understanding the context in which different communities use libraries, and how their environment affects levels of engagement, library services can be improved. While a comprehensive ethnographic study may be challenging to conduct on a national scale, this type of study can help libraries understand the various needs of diverse communities, and how to tailor their services according to those needs.

Questions to Consider

- Are there unique demographics or program foci that would benefit from elaborated exploration of the culture of program participation? For example, might studies of the cultures of clubs or sub-culture groups with hobbies and interests expand thinking about the future direction of library programs?
- How might focused studies in areas with unique cultural or sociological challenges help expand understanding of how programs engage with underserved or traditionally marginalized groups that libraries seek to support?

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory uses a bottom-up approach to research. It is an inductive rather than deductive approach, where theory is developed iteratively, rather than starting with a hypothesis and testing its validity. Grounded theory involves the collection of data in multiple stages, and then the development of a theory based on the comparison of data from different categories to arrive at a conclusion about the research topic (Creswell, 1994). This method allows emerging information about the research participants to guide the research process. One example of this method is described as *narrative inquiry*, an emphasis on exploring the “three-dimensional inquiry space” which encompasses the temporal, spatial, and personal-social aspects of the experience without preconception of impacts or outcomes before exploring the nature by which impacts might accrue (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Questions to Consider

- Are there phenomena unique to the experience of library programming or participant experience that demonstrate lack of an explanatory theory for engagement or resistance?
- Might there be some positive or negative reports about user experiences that require unbiased exploration in order to challenge existing definitions or paradigms?

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research generates learning by doing. It is a multi-step process that involves identifying a research topic, planning how to tackle it, implementing those plans, observing the results, reflecting upon or analyzing the results, and then repeating those steps in an iterative process. Participants form an ‘adaptive’ expertise on the topic of inquiry, continually improving the research process as new insights are discovered.

Participatory action research can empower librarians to develop processes that best analyze their own operations and generate improvements that can be immediately implemented. The iterative process of participatory action research will help libraries continually improve their services through a process of engaged self-reflection and inquiry.

Questions to Consider

- What support and resources might librarians need to help them engage with local programming stakeholders in order to develop generalizable theory from their community priorities?
- What type of data might be useful to support programming librarians who seek to engage in a participatory action model of co-created programming goals, objectives, delivery and reflective review?

Expected Deliverables for the Chicago Workshop

By the end of the two-day stakeholder meeting in Chicago, we hope to :

- Establish common definitions for impact, articulating what impacts will matter to the library field at various levels (local, state and national);
- Identify priority areas for research that will most effectively help the field advance its professional practices;
- Identify priority areas for research that will most efficiently support libraries in their reporting of outcomes and impacts to funders and authorizing agencies;
- Establish principles that can most efficiently help to implement a national data collection and aggregation strategy;
- Identify possible strategies for engaging the nation's libraries and library professionals in the development of common datasets and reporting that can support the research agenda;
- Identify possible structures that can help libraries find common ground with their peers at different scales and organizational structures as they pursue understanding of collective impact; *and*
- Outline next steps for ALA PPO and stakeholders as they pursue development of a research agenda on behalf of the field.

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