Libraries Transforming Communities: Evaluation Plan

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Prepared for: Lainie Castle, Project Director
Prepared by: Rebecca Norlander PhD, John Fraser PhD AIA, Kate Flinner MA
Correspondence: Rebecca Norlander, rnorlander@newknowledge.org

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GOALS:

New Knowledge Organization Ltd. (NewKnowledge), will use the following plan to critically evaluate the four major components of the Libraries Transforming Communities project. As identified by ALA, those four areas are:

- Intensive training for a cohort of up to 50 library professionals and volunteers representing ten libraries nationwide (the "Public Innovators Cohort");
- Training ALA staff and member leaders in the Harwood Institute approach to community engagement and the “turned outward” orientation (the “ALA Cohort”);
- Developing an array of accessible tools and modular learning units for wide distribution to thousands of librarians through conference-based learning sessions, webinars, and the project web site; and
- Building support, visibility, and buy-in for the work of libraries as agents of community innovation and change.
To provide the PIs and project teams with timely information and support the successful accomplishment of the goals of the Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC) initiative, NewKnowledge will employ a three-phase, mixed-methods approach to evaluation. Quantitative and qualitative strategies will be used to assess the various iterations of the project tools and trainings with an attempt to align them with anticipated impacts and outcomes. This evaluation design includes front-end, formative, and summative evaluation phases. It focuses on advancing understanding of the degree to which libraries and librarians are able to “turn outward” and successfully engage their communities by using the Harwood Institute training approach, expand the role of libraries as engines of community development, and better equip ALA to support them.

This evaluation strategy takes into consideration specific recommendations made in The Promise of Libraries Transforming Communities (Keister Armstrong, 2013) study of ALA’s work orienting a pilot group of library leaders in the Harwood Institute approach to “turning outward” and developing the initial materials for distribution through ALA conference programming and online learning. Keister Armstrong’s study concluded that initial “training sessions were successful in meeting the desired project outcomes” and suggested that the subsequent phase focus on assessing fidelity to the initial promise. Therefore, in addition to front-end, formative, and summative evaluation phases, mid-course monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that ongoing training sessions retain the promise identified in the development phase.

This evaluation plan includes specific activities that address each of the four components of the LTC project. Evaluation is aimed at refining tools and trainings, monitoring progress, assessing impact, and generating recommendations based on feedback from the target audiences. Each evaluation phase is structured to ensure that program delivery is aided by user input from several sources, including: Public Innovators Cohort; ALA staff/member trainees, and users of the resources created for distribution to the field at large; the communications campaign; and the evaluation benchmarks described in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Results Framework.

Essential to successful evaluation is the ability to gather unbiased data. Participants will be assured that any information they provide will be anonymized and confidential. To support the project goals of harvesting and sharing stories of practice, participants will have an opportunity to share feedback that can be disclosed publicly during interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

NewKnowledge will provide all members of the Public Innovators Cohort with a detailed outline describing the evaluation and their responsibilities, in order to help them understand the effort and opportunity for synthesizing their learning. These materials will be provided online via http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities/program-evaluation, and will be supplemental to the materials prepared to support the course. The goal of this exercise is to ensure that the evaluation and learning tools are perceived to be part of a single, integrated process aiming at maximizing project impact. The materials will introduce the idea of a community responsive framework, where any evaluation that occurs is created to support the participants’ needs and goals for achieving success.
ALA will be kept up-to-date on all project activities, using various reporting strategies. The first will employ immediate updates on findings via conference call, as needed, and reports of all raw data collected through each survey instrument. NewKnowledge will also produce interim (semi-annual) written reports and a comprehensive final report describing key findings and recommendations for each of the four project areas and assessing overall project impact related to the capacity of libraries and librarians to respond to and work effectively with local communities through the training they received. In addition to the interim and final reports, NewKnowledge will share process documents as analysis begins to take shape and themes emerge.

NewKnowledge will use a culturally responsive framework to guide instrument design. The criteria for such a framework are:

• Respect for group members’ individual cultural heritage and viewpoints on a topic;
• Communication at groups’ levels of understanding;
• Careful observation and listening to all voices;
• Reciprocal flow of information between those evaluating and all members of the community of learners;
• Self-reflection on researchers’ roles as outsiders;
• Safeguarding groups’ dignity; and
• Sharing knowledge in a respectful manner.

We also commit to work in a manner consistent with the tenets of developmental evaluation (Patton, 2010) such that interactions and assessments of project tasks are considered collaborative efforts with all partners in the learning process. Patton emphasizes that:

• All partners jointly shape the project’s course in a reciprocal process of giving and receiving feedback;
• Active collaborations are encouraged between all stakeholders and evaluators; and
• All stakeholders contribute to the project’s progress, making it critically important to have everyone at the table.

Front-End Evaluation

The front-end evaluation builds on NewKnowledge’s work with ALA Public Programs Office’s IMLS-funded project, *Assessing the National Impact of Library Public Programs* (NILPPA), by outlining principles of public engagement as a baseline for subsequent evaluation phases. Principles of public engagement and a culturally responsive framework both emphasize collaborative participation, reciprocity and respect for diversity of views. Aligning resources related to this project will add value to the evaluation of the LTC initiative.

The front-end evaluation includes interviews with the four Advanced Leaders Training participants, and a pre-training assessment of the Public Innovators Cohort, with results compared to results from the Keister Armstrong report and described in first interim report delivered to ALA by August 1, 2014. Although this work is critical for successful
achievement of subsequent evaluation phases, it will be undertaken in parallel to the early phase mid-course monitoring and formative evaluation.

Setting expectations

To establish effective communication and transparency between NewKnowledge and project stakeholders, a web page entitled “Evaluation” will be added by ALA as sub-navigation to the main project website (http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities). This website will be used to share findings, reports, and executive summaries produced by NewKnowledge as they are produced. This website will provide reference material and additional information for all participants about the nature of our work, including evaluation strategy, data-collection activities, and expectations for feedback.

Following up with Advanced Leaders

We recognize the contribution of the pilot, The Promise of Libraries Transforming Communities, in setting the stage for the projected work to occur in 2014-2015. The front-end evaluation of the LTC initiative addresses the recommendation made in this pilot study that participants of the Advanced Leaders Training in January 2013 undergo a follow-up evaluation. NewKnowledge will interview all four Advanced Leaders in May 2014 as part of the front-end evaluation phase, comparing the results with results from interviews that occurred six months following the initial training to explore deviation from the anticipated results. All interviews will be conducted via Skype or Google Hangout with recording to permit later coding and analysis. Transcripts will be delivered to ALA within one month of the last interview conducted.

Pre-training survey of Public Innovators Cohort

Another important aspect of front-end evaluation will be a survey sent to representatives of the ten participating libraries (approximately 50 individuals) before they undergo training in the Harwood Institute approach, to understand current dimensions of library professionals and volunteers’ work with communities. The survey will be administered to the Public Innovators Cohort via web link and data collected May 9-19, 2014. These data will allow for project team briefing to support scaffolding where there are deviations from those studied in the development phase, as well as provide comparative data for use in the summative evaluation at the project conclusion.

Mid-course Monitoring

Midcourse monitoring evaluation will ensure that the model initially proven effective through the pilot study (Keister Armstrong, 2013) continues to be successful as it is expanded to include a more diverse participant pool. The design of this monitoring responds to the desire of ALA and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to deepen their understanding of the effectiveness of the Harwood Institute-taught skills and tools, including what contributes to or detracts from the approach’s level of effectiveness for library-led community engagement. Therefore, our goal is to refine training processes and provide information that will aid ALA in adjusting the program to address change.
The first monitoring task was the deployment of an evaluation instrument for attendees at four conference sessions held at the Public Library Association’s (PLA) Annual Conference. These training sessions occurred March 13-14, 2014. This instrument assessed both content and delivery of the training, focusing on the relevance and usefulness of the session to librarians’ current work. This instrument will be adapted by NewKnowledge and administered at the 16 other ALA and PLA conference sessions/workshops according to the Gates Foundation’s Results Framework.

Survey tools will also be deployed to members of the Public Innovators Cohort who attend the May 2014 Harwood Institute trainings. These surveys will focus on understanding perceptions of the potential of the program for advancing field of librarianship, and how well the training supports an active group of early adopters. Tools for this assessment will be developed based on refinement of the pilot study instruments to measure progress according to benchmarks set by the Gates Foundation’s Results Framework.

**Post-training survey of Public Innovators Cohort**

Immediately following the Harwood Institute training, a survey will be sent to all participants in order to gather feedback about both the content and process of the trainings. This survey will cover the format, delivery, and method of training; ask about new ideas that resulted from participation; determine what participants anticipate needing to successfully “turn outward;” explore potential barriers to implementing the Harwood approach; and gather insight about improving future trainings. The survey questions will be oriented around the stated goals and objectives of the training as outlined by ALA and Harwood, so that survey responses can directly measure the effectiveness of these sessions.

The results from the post-training survey will be analyzed and reported as part of the front-end evaluation results included in the first interim report, to be delivered to ALA by August 1, 2014.

**Delayed (6-month) quantitative impact post-training survey of Public Innovators Cohort**

In November 2014, a second survey will be sent electronically to the Public Innovators Cohort to assess their progress. These benchmarking surveys will offer reminders of the results from the post-survey and solicit information related to change after time has been allowed to implement new practices of community engagement at their libraries. At this stage, new questions will focus on the degree to which the Harwood approach has been useful for improving the ability of libraries to respond to their communities’ needs. Questions will focus on to what extent participants have initiated library-led community convenings, if/how they have shared lessons learned or mentored peers who did not receive the Harwood training, and libraries’ capacity for communicating and collaborating more effectively with community partners.

**Analysis of conference calls and webinars**

The Public Innovators Cohort will receive support in the form of monthly coaching/peer learning calls and six webinars. Recordings from these calls will be analyzed by NewKnowledge to note themes that may arise. Any concerns or challenges expressed by participants will be documented during this process.
Qualitative interviews with Public Innovators Cohort

Beginning in September 2014, two participating individuals will be recruited from each training site (n = 10) according to criteria based on data that have emerged thus far in the project to participate an in-depth qualitative interview. The two representatives from each site will be interviewed as a pair over Skype or Google Hangout. In our experience, interviewing participants as pairs instead of individually has been an effective way of stimulating lively conversation, scaffolding of reasoning or explanation, deeper reflection on learning outcomes, and greater willingness to explore challenges that others face or overcame. These interviews will be recorded, coded, analyzed, and reported alongside the quantitative data to further illustrate the findings.

Findings resulting from the post/delayed post-training surveys, feedback from the coaching calls/webinars, and insight gathered during the qualitative interviews will be described in the second interim report, to be delivered to ALA by February 2, 2015. This report will support broader and iterative development of training techniques. Findings in this report can be shared with the cohort during subsequent conference calls, so that participants are able to learn from others in the group about how to become ambassadors for the role of libraries as innovative community change agents.

Formative Evaluation

NewKnowledge will undertake formative evaluation to assess the development, design, and modification of “action tools” and resources developed by ALA and the Harwood Institute for staff and member leader use, which will be made available through the ALA’s Transforming Libraries website. ALA will create resources and learning opportunities that will support distribution to the field along a broader learning continuum to thousands of librarians through conference-based and online distance learning opportunities. These broader resources will include tools for library-led community innovation created with the Harwood Institute, as well as aggregation of other models of civic engagement, dialogue facilitation and systems-change leadership efforts currently available to and used by the field.

To help shape the ongoing development and implementation of these new tools and resources, NewKnowledge will employ web analytics to monitor user behavior, changes in traffic, and patterns of communication. The interactive forum “ALA Connect” will be monitored by NewKnowledge for user-generated commentary added to the blog, chat room, or discussion board. A third strategy employing a “Send Feedback” button will be added to the LTC tools and materials website (http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities) to offer another way for users to comment on specific resources.

ALA-led tool and resource development will occur between October 2014 and March 2015. Assessing the use and impact of these tools will be the subject of NewKnowledge’s third interim report, to be delivered by August 3, 2015. The report will analyze data gathered and make specific recommendations for refining the action tools and associated resources. The report will examine the range of factors that may influence tool and resource use and provide recommendations for tool modification and subsequent development phases.
Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation will focus on impact achievement and the success of the project according to stated project goals. It will compare intended change with actual change in the way that libraries engage their communities through the Harwood Institute’s method of “turning outward”, thus generalizing the findings from the earlier stages to a larger community. The summative evaluation will assess the extent to which ALA – through training their own staff in the Harwood approach – is able to mirror the shift in orientation and competencies that this project proposes for the field of public librarianship. It will also focus on the fourth area of the project, the “communications campaign,” assessing whether librarians are capable of providing models for use in diverse communities, with a variety of local stakeholders, affect the national media discourse, and the ALA’s own conference programming.

Program Impacts “Progress Reports”

In September 2015, NewKnowledge will return all Public Innovators Cohort members’ answers to the pre-, post- and six-month-delayed-post training surveys to their owners for review. The final survey will ask these individuals to review, reflect, and then describe their accomplishments, with specific reference to their earlier answers. This secondary delayed post-training evaluation will provide a “progress report,” generated by project participants as a way to help them measure their own progress. This approach aims to help trainees develop a clear picture of what they have achieved personally through the training and to more fully represent the overall change and impact that is useful for the participant as well as the project leadership team.

Transformation Assessment: Communities

In October 2015, NewKnowledge will explore the impact of the LTC initiative through a set of 10 online focus groups. Six focus groups will occur with members of communities where librarians have been trained as part of the Public Innovators Cohort in the Harwood approach. The remaining four control groups will be drawn from community members whose library staff neither participated in this training program nor experienced more than one presentation at a conference. Focus group participants from all groups will be recruited via email and offered an Amazon or other gift card as an incentive to participate. Libraries supporting recruitment for the control groups may also be offered a small honorarium in support of their programs to encourage participation.

A qualitative phenomenological approach will be used to capture deep descriptions of the unique experiences and perspectives of library users and stakeholders in the community. This phenomenological tradition offers a more complete understanding of individuals’ lived experience by uncovering their hidden assumptions and values through the close examination of their perspective of related phenomena.

ALA staff journaling project

As indicated in the LTC project objectives, up to 50 ALA staff and member leaders received initial training in the Harwood approach to community engagement from April 2014, with the goal of creating deep internal knowledge, supporting
sustainability, and aligning ALA’s internal processes to work in the field. Capacity building for ALA staff will be further enhanced through quarterly Innovation Space meetings at ALA headquarters in Chicago.

To assess change for ALA staff members, NewKnowledge will employ a journaling activity as an evaluation tool. At a meeting to be held approximately 30 days following the April 7-8, 2014 training, participating staff will be asked to brainstorm journal prompts that could elicit useful ways to reflect on their own advancement. Based on this input, NewKnowledge will create a set of prompts for an online monthly reflection journaling exercise to be offered to staff members. Each member of the ALA staff cohort, along with any other ALA staff who would like to participate, will be sent a link to these prompts, directing them to a third-party encrypted website where all journal entries will be logged. Participating staff will be able to read and comment on their prior entries and reflect on change over time. One week prior to each Innovation Space meeting, or as often as deemed useful by NewKnowledge and ALA project leaders, journal entries will be used to generate a one-page report on emerging data that can be used for discussion. NewKnowledge will then review the summary of meeting activity and results will be included in the first and second interim reports, dated August 1, 2014 and February 2, 2015.

**National media discourse**

Throughout the LTC initiative, ALA will provide communications support to local libraries and pursue external coverage of libraries as agents of change with the national media. To capture change that results from this effort, NewKnowledge will undertake evaluation in accordance with the Gates Foundation’s Results Framework to determine whether there has been a shift in public discourse about public libraries in the national and local media between the start of the project and November 2015. The goal of this effort is to determine if the project might have contributed to a transition from the current dominant narratives and whether these new discourses more closely reflect the project language. NewKnowledge will employ semantic analysis software, such as Leximancer, to analyze a data corpus extracted from media reports and news articles, noting trends in both local and national media content to determine if a shift has occurred. The first data corpus will be assembled in May 2014, covering media dated 2007 to present. A second comparative data corpus will be assembled from news media reports from November 2014 through November 2015, and analyzed using the same tools to determine the presence of change. Sources will include the Google News search engine and any local articles assembled by ALA and the trainee libraries whose local media coverage may not be indexed and searchable online. A supplementary data set will be compiled from academic journals.

The Leximancer software is based on natural semantic language processing. It conducts automatic content analysis of text to uncover themes from the connections between words used in any data corpus. By ranking words based on their frequencies and then assessing their co-occurrence with other words, the software can generate specific “concepts” for each set of words that are semantically close. Leximancer offers the flexibility to tailor analysis depending upon the specific research questions, as long as they are part of a deliberate analysis strategy that can be justified. For example, the total number of automatically selected concepts can be increased to extract more specific concepts from the low-ranked words.
Conference session content analysis

Lastly, NewKnowledge will examine whether the training has altered the professional discourses by undertaking an assessment of member- and staff-driven conference session proposals and reported activities related to libraries as engines of community development at ALA annual, division, regional, and state library conferences.

Summative Report

A comprehensive final report will be delivered to ALA PPO by December 14, 2015 including an executive summary, review of research, analysis of research, recommendations (such as opportunities to increase impact or refine delivery techniques), conclusion, and references list. The report will summarize surveys, interviews, focus groups, online analytics, and related data gathered; and detail adjustments to project design and the effectiveness of those adjustments. The final report will focus on describing key findings and articulate the overall project impact. The final report will assess the extent to which libraries and librarians have developed strategies rooted in an understanding of their communities’ shared aspirations. It will also explore the extent to which they are better positioned to navigate and work with changes in community demographics, leadership structures, and local fiscal and social issues. Ideally, positioning library professionals and volunteers as facilitators of community knowledge and dialogue will enhance the library’s potential as community change maker, and deepen the reservoir of trust enjoyed by public libraries across the country.
References

Keister Armstrong, S. (2013, August 8). The promise of libraries transforming communities. Grays Lake IL: Turks Cap Consulting, LLC.