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PLA celebrates Project Outcome success; transitions resources for free ongoing use

project
OUTCOME
MEASURING THE TRUE
IMPACT OF LIBRARIES

CHICAGO—The Public Library Association (PLA) today launched a suite of [outcome measurement resources](#) developed as part of the Project Outcome toolkit. The new webpages culminate a decade of work dedicated to sharing the impact of public library services and programs via simple surveys and an easy process to measure and analyze patron outcomes. The “Utilizing Outcome Measurement to Improve Library Services” [webinar](#) on August 28 will guide participants through the templates and tools.

When first funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2015, Project Outcome aimed to enlist 250 public libraries in measuring outcomes. PLA more than tripled this number in the first year after launch with 900 libraries running surveys. In the last ten years, more than 2,600 libraries collected almost 500,000 patron responses through more than 38,000 surveys on the Project Outcome platform.

To contain costs while sustaining free access, PLA is sunsetting the online platform and transitioning the Project Outcome for Public Libraries resources for local use. The new [Outcome Measurement for Public Libraries](#) landing page empowers both new and veteran library staff to get started; download surveys in Google and Microsoft formats; develop new survey questions and collect, analyze and visualize data; create reports; and gain the skills and confidence to use all the resources for evaluation and advocacy. Nine standard [surveys](#) are available and cover topics that include summer reading, job skills, early childhood literacy, digital learning, and health.

“Public libraries have used Project Outcome’s free resources to demonstrate their effectiveness for grants-based projects, incentive programs, and strategic planning—thus turning better data into better libraries by making data-informed decisions,” said PLA President Dr. Brandy McNeil. “PLA set goals not only to increase measurement but also the understanding of the value of outcome measurement and how to use outcome data. PLA and libraries exceeded all these goals, creating lasting change in the field.”

Measuring outcomes helps libraries answer the question, “What good did we do?” Outcomes can be quantitative or qualitative and are often expressed as changes that individuals perceive in themselves. The standardized surveys developed for Project Outcome help staff measure four key patron outcomes—knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness—in nine key library service areas.

In a 2023 Project Outcome user survey, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Project Outcome helped improve assessment practices in the library and helped advocate for the value of library programs and services. One user shared: “It really help to change how I think about why we are offering programs. It has helped us focus on our mission, vision, and values and think about our programs through the eyes of our community.”

As part of PLA’s data initiatives, the organization also offers training and resources to support [Census data literacy](#), a [clearinghouse](#) of national data about public libraries, collecting and disseminating data through three unique national surveys that rotate annually, and provides library data visualizations through [Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends](#). The [2024 Public Library Staff Survey](#) report will be available this month, followed by a free [webinar](#) to share key findings. These services are developed and delivered in collaboration with PLA’s [Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Advisory Group](#).

“Project Outcome is one example of PLA’s commitment to seeding, catalyzing, and sustaining transformative change with and for public libraries and the communities they serve,” McNeil added. “I am proud of how our staff and member leaders have shepherded grant-funded efforts like Project Outcome and [DigitalLearn](#) to keep them freely available beyond the original funding while continuing to innovate.”

Learn more about all of PLA’s data projects at <https://www.ala.org/pla/data>. PLA [members](#) and subscribers power PLA initiatives to strengthen public libraries and their contributions to communities.

About the Public Library Association

The Public Library Association (PLA) is the largest association dedicated to supporting the unique and evolving needs of public library professionals. Founded in 1944, PLA serves nearly 10,000 members in public libraries large and small in communities across the United States and Canada, with a growing presence around the world. PLA strives to help its members shape the essential institution of public libraries by serving as an indispensable ally for public library leaders. For more information about PLA, contact the PLA office at 1 (800) 545-2433, ext. 5PLA, or pla@ala.org.

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