

# Library Services and Technology Act

## FIVE-YEAR PLAN EVALUATION

Making a Difference @ your library™



Columbus Public Library's 1998 LSTA grant makes Internet and CD-ROMs available to children

**Nebraska Library Commission**  
**Rod Wagner, Director**

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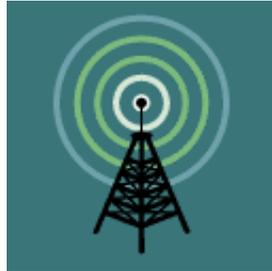
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Madison Public Library, Madison County Historical Society Museum, and  
Madison City Hall Share a Common Facility



*Think of organizational data as a wave, moving through space developing more and more potential explanations. If this wave meets up with one observer, it will collapse into one interpretation. All other potentialities are lost by that act of observation. An organization swimming in many interpretations can discuss, combine, and build on them. The outcome has to be a much richer sense of what needs to be done. The more participants we engage in this participative universe, the wiser we become.*

*-- Margaret Wheatley, Leadership and the New Science*

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## Executive Summary

*Every organization is an identity in motion,  
moving through the world, trying to make a difference.*  
-- Margaret Wheatley & Myron Kellner-Rogers [A Simpler Way]

The following is a report on a comprehensive statewide evaluation project conducted by the Nebraska Library Commission. The primary objective of the project was to provide the Institute for Library and Museum Services (IMLS) with an in-depth analysis of the impact of federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding on Nebraska's libraries and communities. A secondary objective was to collect consistent, specific information from all of Nebraska's public libraries about their successes, challenges, and dreams for providing library and information services, in order for the Library Commission to provide responsive, appropriate services and programs in the future.

In part, this evaluation demonstrates:

that the infusion of federal funds throughout the library communities of Nebraska has had a significant impact on the growth and development of technology and on statewide access to library and information services;

that the competitive grant process has improved the skills of local library staff, encouraged collaboration and cooperation both within and between communities, and has encouraged local support in the form of funding and good will;

that the Library Commission developed successful programs and services to accomplish the five major goals identified in its document, *Libraries for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Nebraska Library Commission Library Services and Technology Act Five Year Plan, October 1, 1997 – September 30, 2002*; and,

that the six regional library systems support the goals and services of the Commission, and provide personal consulting and training opportunities for staff from libraries of all types.

In order to conduct this evaluation, the Nebraska Library Commission identified a core group of staff members who worked together develop a strategy to conduct the research and collect and compile the findings in a comprehensive, consistent manner. This report will describe in detail the goals, methodology and outcomes of this process.

The decision to have Commission staff complete this evaluation was a deliberate one. Team members improved their facilitation and recording skills, gained insight into the day-to-day work of the public libraries in the state, and developed a better understanding of the needs, abilities and dreams of libraries and their communities. In the course of conducting library visits, Commission staff have been warmly welcomed by both library staff and community members alike. This has already resulted in improved relationships with library staff throughout the state,

more responsive consulting, and with Commission staff taking a more personal interest in the improvement of library services.

An analysis of the data collected during this process resulted in the following recommendations for the future distribution of LSTA funds:

### **LSTA Competitive Grant Recommendations**

*Technical issues:* NLC staff should provide expertise and consulting before, during and after grant process to evaluate and select appropriate hardware, software, technical support, installation, etc. It is also recommended that the NLC maintain a list of libraries that use various automated systems and names of staff willing to demonstrate or provide training on the systems.

*Evaluation:* The NLC should provide outcome-based training for state, regional and local library staff. Evaluation expectations need to be clearly articulated in the grant application instructions and examples of outcome measures provided.

*Follow-up:* NLC staff should monitor interim and final grant reports for outcome-based measures and probe for stories from local libraries and communities if none are provided.

*Sustainability:* Many libraries have received multiple LSTA grants during the evaluation period; therefore a majority of their technology and automation has been funded with federal monies. For many libraries the local commitment and funding to sustain or increase the level of technology is not in place. The NLC should assist local libraries in planning and budgeting for technology maintenance and future development. One strategy would be to build into the LSTA grant process a sustainability element, perhaps using the model from the Gates Library Project.

*Future Grants:* The NLC should consider funding larger, statewide projects that could benefit more libraries. Examples include digitization projects and database access.

*Local Match:* The requirement for local matching funds in LSTA competitive grant projects should be maintained as it allows limited funds to be maximized and builds in a commitment for the project on the local level.

*Grant Application Process:* LSTA competitive grant applications can be submitted online at the present time, however a printed signature page must be sent in separately. The NLC should implement use of electronic signatures in subsequent LSTA and other grant applications. The NLC should adhere to a consistent timeframe, i.e. announce and award the grants the same time each year, allow for the same time to complete the grant applications each year, and the same amount of time to implement the grants and submit a final report.

*Grant Review Process:* The NLC should involve grant reviewers from outside of the agency.

*Grant Process Follow-Up:* The NLC should review the grant application process each year shortly after grants are awarded to note what worked well and what needs to be improved or

changed. Projects that are not funded should be reviewed to learn what the NLC can do to assist libraries in future grant applications.

The following general recommendations pertain to the administration and implementation of Library Commission programs and services in the future:

### **General Recommendations**

The NLC 2003-2008 Long Range Plan needs to articulate specific objectives for each of the goals and to incorporate outcome-based evaluation.

The NLC should require that all LSTA-funded (and state-funded) programs and services include outcome based evaluation measures and that reports from LSTA-funded projects be submitted in a timely, consistent fashion and include outcomes.

The NLC should continue to develop planning and evaluation knowledge and skills among agency staff, regional library system staff, and local library staff.

The NLC should work towards a clearer and separate delineation of state and federal funds for specific programs and services.

The NLC should conduct in depth evaluations relating to the agency's various Aid programs, on the purpose, structure, funding, and impact of:

- The six Regional Library Systems.
- Lender Compensation
- State Aid to Public Libraries
- Statewide Databases
- Continuing Education and Training Grants

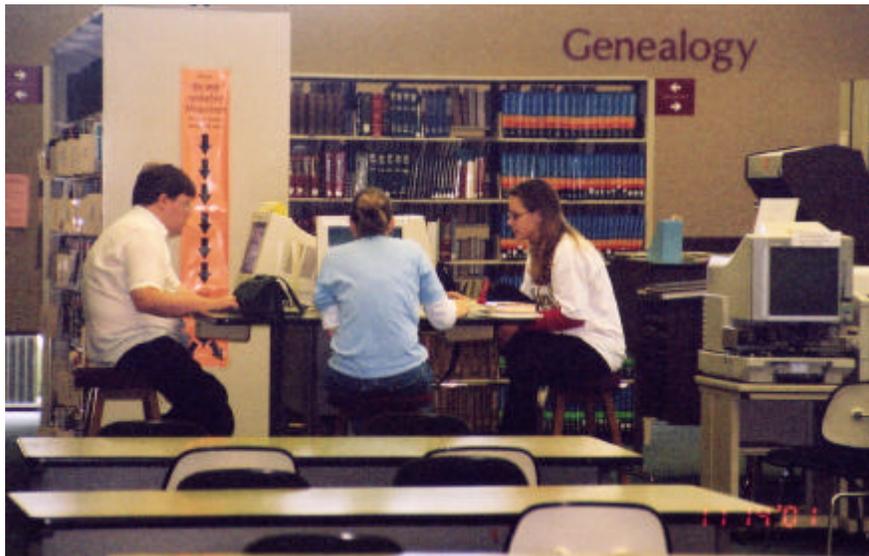
The NLC should evaluate the impact of its Accreditation Guidelines on various size and type of libraries in order to prioritize the level of effort and resources expended by NLC and the Regional Library Systems.

The NLC should provide guidelines to ensure that the NLC and sub recipients of LSTA funds (systems and local libraries) credit the Institute of Museum and Library Services for LSTA funded projects.

The NLC is encouraged to sponsor a statewide conference for librarians, library trustees, and interested others to explore library and information service needs of special populations and to raise awareness of existing programs and services for special populations. These populations include, but are not limited to, people with diverse cultural and socioeconomic background, people with limited functional literacy or information skills, and persons having difficulty using a library.

The NLC should make recruitment and retention of library personnel a priority and utilize LSTA and state general funds to support strategies to address this critical issue.

The NLC should develop consistent evaluation plans and report forms for major programs and projects, in order to facilitate data collection, reporting and analysis of program effectiveness and to better evaluate program costs.



Grand Island Public Library customers using public access computers to search genealogy resources