

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.

Evaluation Methodology

EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS:

Twenty-one Library Commission staff were identified to serve on two-member evaluation and planning teams. Our goal was to have a team spend a day in most, if not all, of the 273 public libraries in Nebraska over the course of a thirteen-month period (May 2001-June 2002). So far, Library Commission staff have visited 202 public libraries from the period beginning April 16, 2001 through April 30, 2002 (see Appendix B for data on library visits). The remainder of the library visits will be made by the end of June 2002.

- State Advisory Council on Libraries
- Nebraska Library Commissioners
- Regional Library Systems - Staff and Boards
- Local Library staff, trustees, and customers
- Target groups of consumers of LSTA funded programs and services
- Other key partners identified in Nebraska's current LSTA five-year plan
- Library Commission staff :

Rod Wagner, Director
Nancy Busch, Deputy Director
Mary Jo Ryan, Communications Coordinator
Kit Keller, Library Data Services Coordinator
Richard Miller, Library Development Director
Dave Oertli, Talking Book and Braille Service Director
Sally Snyder, Federal Aid Administrator
Mary Jackson, Children and Young Adult Services Coordinator
Christa Burns, OCLC Member Services Coordinator
Devra Dragos, Cataloguing Librarian
Beth Goble, Government Services Coordinator
Annette Hall, Volunteer Services Coordinator
Lisa Kelly, Reference Services Coordinator
Susan Knisely, Online Services Librarian
Evelyn Kubert, Interlibrary Loan Staff Assistant
Allana Novotny, Network Services Librarian
Julie Pinnell, Information Services Librarian
Pam Scott, Library Consultant
Janet Greser, Infrastructure Support Analyst
Diane Wells, Infrastructure Support Technician
Shannon Behrhorst, Network Services Director

Nebraska Library Commission staff were the primary source of evaluation and planning assistance in this project. Early in the project, Jim Kieffer, consultant with the Nebraska Health System's office for Organizational and Development, provided the Making a Difference team with training on group facilitation.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY:

The following general steps guided the evaluation process:

- Identification of NLC lead staff
- Identification of key stakeholders in the library community
- Establishment of NLC evaluation team
- Formation of time lines
- Identification of goals, activities and specific programs to be evaluated using outcome-based measurement containing the following components from Perspectives on Outcome Based Evaluation for Libraries and Museums:
 - Inputs - "Resources dedicated to or consumed by a program (e.g., money, staff, volunteers, facilities, library materials, equipment)."
 - Activities - "What the program does with the inputs to fulfill its mission (e.g., conduct storytimes, after-school home-work clinics, summer reading programs, parent education classes, information literacy classes)."
 - Outputs - "Direct products of program activities, usually measured in terms of work accomplished (e.g., number of story time attendees, number of parent education classes taught, number of children participating in summer reading program, number attending information literacy classes)."
 - Outcomes - "Benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities, including new knowledge, increased skills, changing attitudes or values, modified behavior, improved condition, or altered status (e.g., number of children who learned a finger play during story time, number of parents who indicated that they gained new knowledge or skills as a result of parent education classes, number of students whose grades improved after homework clinics, number of children who maintained reading skills over the summer as a result of a summer reading program, number of people who report being better able to access and use networked information after attending information literacy classes)."
- Determination of appropriate methods, data collection techniques for each program evaluated
- Conducting evaluations
- Reporting findings to IMLS and other stakeholders

Where specific benchmarks were recorded during each of the five years, those were examined with the advances or deficits noted and the effects on library service estimated through use of quantitative data such as compiled statistics, interviews and surveys. Any changes that can be said to have resulted from the activity were noted. A key issue was trying to determine whether or not the services and projects are meeting customer needs. Anecdotal and other qualitative data were gathered to personalize the evaluation and demonstrate the value to users.

One goal of the evaluation was to learn what programs have been effective and what areas of service need to be improved or changed. This information will be used to assist the Library Commission in approaching services and projects from a statewide level as well as at the

community level. A proactive approach to providing library and information services statewide may result in more effective and cost-efficient services.

Each local library site visit had two components:

- Evaluation of LSTA, State Aid, Children's or other grants made to the library by the NLC during the evaluation period - the emphasis on this portion of the site visit was to review projects, talk about outcomes, observe library patterns, etc.
- Public forums or Dialogues with library staff, trustees, library customers, and other interested community members--the purpose of the dialogue was to gain a better understanding of local issues, concerns, and goals for the future, as well as to learn how state and regional services impact local library services.



Agnes Robinson Waterloo (pop. 459) Library trustees and customers dream about future library services with NLC staff in public dialogue session

The decision to rely on Library Commission staff to plan and implement the evaluation met several needs:

- to develop and improve evaluation and facilitation skills among a large number of agency staff;
- to build a better understanding among Library Commission staff of existing conditions in local libraries across the state;
- to build relationships between local library staff and state library staff.

In addition, at least one major LSTA funded program, service, or project was selected from each of the five evaluation years. Criteria for consideration included: importance of the project as a model for Nebraska; cumulative amount of funding expended for the project, and overall impact.

Steering Team members identified staff to be involved in the evaluation project, subsequently called the “Making a Difference” project. For purposes of scheduling and communication, an e-mail group was created that included all staff involved in the project. A sub-set of this team met initially to plan for the larger group meetings, drafting sample questions and process recommendations. This smaller group worked with an outside trainer to refine the survey questions and discuss desired outcomes. The trainer then met with the entire Making a Difference team to discuss facilitation and recording skills, and to conduct role-playing activities that helped to demonstrate these skills. See Appendix C for a complete set of Making a Difference materials sent to public libraries prior to each visit.

Weekly two-hour meetings were scheduled for the entire Making a Difference team. During the initial meetings, the group discussed their expectations about the process, and made suggestions about how to schedule and coordinate the 273 public library visits. Information was collected about travel preferences and possible schedule conflicts, how to handle emergencies that might arise, and how to distribute the responsibilities for each library visit. A travel notebook was created and distributed to each team member. The group compiled a list of project activities and materials and tasks were assigned to various team members. One agency meeting room was set aside for the purpose of storing supplies. Note cards were ordered for staff to write a personal thank you to each library director immediately following a visit. Photographs were taken during each visit. Photograph albums were compiled, and representative photographs were selected from each visit to put on the project Web site: (see Appendix D).

<http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/mission/librariesstafflist.html>

All team members needed to become more familiar with the services and activities of other agency departments. Time was spent at several team meetings reviewing details of department activities and responding to questions posed by team members. The group was asked to familiarize themselves with the library files stored in the Administration area, since these provide background information about each library and community. Each team member received updated census data about their assigned communities.

Staff were asked to review the agency’s LSTA Five-Year Evaluation Plan, and to read and discuss an article entitled, *An Evaluation Culture* (<http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/evalcult.htm>).

To facilitate systematic data collection from the 273 public libraries statewide, a folder was created for each library. A contact sheet and library profile was created in each folder. The contact sheet consisted of three parts: a library visit checklist, a trip checklist, and a post-visit checklist. The profile is a compilation of core data about the library, staffing, board members, funding and information about grants awarded during the evaluation time frame (see Appendix E).

Additional worksheets were added to each profile for the purpose of recording responses to the questions asked at each library visit. All profiles have four worksheets for staff to record the responses to the questions asked of all libraries. Libraries that received any type of grant during the evaluation time frame have four worksheets to be used to record library responses to the four

questions related to grants. Libraries that received any state aid awards during the evaluation time frame have two worksheets to record responses to the two questions relating to state aid. All libraries have five worksheets used to record the five questions asked during the Dialogue Session of the library visit.

In order to both quantify and qualify the participants in the library visits, worksheets were created to list the names and roles of all visit attendees. Participants at the general library sessions were asked to list their name and job title. Participants at the dialogue sessions were asked to list their name, and their reason for attending the session.

Each profile also contains a feedback sheet. Here team members were asked to list any topic or issue raised during the library visit that requires some kind of action or follow-up. Staff then sent an e-mail message to the appropriate staff member, explaining the issue and need for follow-up. The purpose of this activity was to track areas of Commission activities that might need additional attention or clarification in the future. Typical follow-up issues include information about upcoming grant opportunities, how to apply for an E-rate discount, how to register for online database access, additional information about the agency's Talking Book & Braille services, and questions about new agency programs.

The list of libraries was divided randomly among the Making a Difference team members. Each member received a list of their assigned libraries, with a master list available on a shared directory. Each team member was responsible for making initial contact with each library director on their assigned list, arranging a visit date, selecting a partner, and notifying the support staff person designated to send out the visit materials to each library. Staff were encouraged to vary their partner selection, so that it would be possible to work with a variety of staff throughout the agency.

Following each visit, partners record the notes taken in the appropriate worksheets in each library's profile. The notes from the Dialogue Session are printed and sent to each library director.

Once the visits were under way, the weekly team meetings consisted mainly of reports about the visits. A brief report template was developed to ensure that some basic information would be included with each report. Team members also shared information about the community, as well as details about the issues raised, successes, unique activities, and areas where follow-up might be necessary. Throughout the year, the group paid attention to activities such as the accreditation process, E-rate deadlines, state aid distribution, grant application processes, and other topics, so that these activities could be discussed at any library meetings held during those time frames. One weekly team meeting was devoted to discussion of how the Making a Difference lessons learned related to similar rural development findings (see Appendix F).

The "Making a Difference @ your library" theme was adopted by the Nebraska Library Association for their annual Legislative Day event, and photographs and stories from the visits were highlighted at that event, attended by many state senators and library staff from around the state (see Appendix G).

Three team members attended training sessions sponsored by the Institute of Museums and Libraries on outcome-based evaluation, and then shared the information from these workshops at a team meeting. In June an agency staff forum was held about the Making a Difference project. This provided an opportunity for staff not involved in the project to learn about the activities, and ask questions. Several Making a Difference team members attended a meeting of the State Advisory Council on Libraries, to report on the project (see Appendix H), show the developing Web site, and respond to questions from the group. Monthly announcements were posted on the NLC's Web site to track the progress of the Making a Difference project. Other Making a Difference promotional activities included articles in regional library system newsletters (see Appendix I).

As more data was entered into the library files, staff created an authority file of keywords to apply to the feedback worksheets. The grant response worksheets were compiled and sorted by type of grant and agency goal the project applied to, in order to facilitate data analysis.

BUILDING OF NLC STAFF EVALUATION SKILLS

A major benefit of the Making a Difference approach to evaluating Nebraska's long range plan has been the knowledge and experience gained in evaluation by 21 (out of 46) NLC staff. A long-term goal of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Library Program's "Evaluating Library Programs & Services" project and more recently the IMLS's emphasis on outcome-based evaluation is development of planning and evaluation skills among state, regional and local library personnel. The NLC chose to involve 21 of its staff in this project in order to improve planning and evaluation knowledge and skills. Several activities over the course of a year and a half have contributed to this goal:

- involvement of the team in the design of the Making a Difference project;
- training for the team in facilitation techniques;
- the expectation that each team member would make 25-30 library visits over the course of approximately one year;
- documentation of each visit through photos and notes from sessions with staff and the public in the Making a Difference database;
- three team members participated in IMLS Outcome Based Evaluation training and in turn shared that training with the full Making a Difference team;
- weekly meetings of the team to discuss lessons learned on library visits;
- team participation in "making sense" out of data gathered from library visits and other methods.

As a result, 21 out of a total of 46 staff have are experiencing an intense, extended and hands-on evaluation project that will have long-term benefit to other programs and services of the NLC. This knowledge will also benefit local libraries through consulting and improved evaluation in future LSTA and State grant programs.

EVALUATION BUDGET:

Estimated costs for the above total less was than \$25,000. Actual budget expenditures to date are outlined in Table 24. Due to the travel intensive process used in the evaluation, those costs constitute the majority of expenses. As of April 22, costs for the project were only \$20,603 and less than a third of those costs were paid with LSTA funds.

Table 24. LSTA Five-Year Evaluation Budget

Make-A-Difference Cost (March 2001 - April 22, 2002)	State	Federal	Cash	
Lodging	\$2,291.54	\$2,016.64		
Lease Car (Agency Car)	\$1,664.49	\$1,089.41		
Rental Car	\$1,990.42	\$2,878.24		
Employee Expenses	\$1,231.65	\$ 295.68	\$ 54.42	
Trainer Fee	\$ 460.41			
Printing/Copying	\$ 695.10			
Supplies	\$ 814.40	\$ 852.00		
Film Processing	\$ 825.32	\$ 673.36		
Film Purchase	\$ 535.00			
Maps (State)	\$ 123.40			
Postage	\$ 250.00			
Communications	\$ 138.50	\$ 138.50		
Contractual Service*	\$1,584.60			
*total hours/cost estimated through end of project				
Totals	\$12,604.83	\$ 7,943.83	\$ 54.42	
Total State, Federal and Cash				\$20,603.08



Community members at a Dialogue session at the Niobrara (pop. 379) Public Library

EVALUATION TIMELINE:

DECEMBER 2000	NLC STEERING TEAM RETREAT TO DRAFT EVALUATION PLAN PROCESS REVIEW DRAFT OF EVALUATION PLAN WITH STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON LIBRARIES
January 2001	Internal staff meetings to work on evaluation plan Present draft evaluation plan to NLC Commissioners Initial meeting of NLC evaluation teams
February 2001	Develop site visit and local dialogue structure Training of NLC evaluation teams
March 2001	Conduct focus group with State Advisory Council
April 2001-June 2002	Site visits and dialogues with public libraries
March 2002	Draft evaluation report and review with State Advisory Council on Libraries and NLC Commissioners
April 2002	Submit evaluation report to IMLS
July 2002	Submit long-range plan to IMLS