

User Satisfaction with Access To Government Information And Services At Public Libraries And Public Access Computing Centers

*A proposal from the University of Illinois Library Research Center and the Pew Research Center, Internet & American Life Project
Leigh Estabrook and Lee Rainie, principle investigators*

Abstract:

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has identified the importance of American people having reliable, accurate, and up-to-date government information, much of which is delivered via the Internet. IMLS has also realized that little is known about the assistance individuals with limited access to Internet resources receive when looking for different kinds of government information and services, and whether they are satisfied with the assistance they receive from public libraries and public access computing centers. The following proposal provides a strategy for addressing this gap in knowledge. In particular, it proposes (1) a national survey of low income/low access to Internet individuals about their use of and access to federal, state, and local government information and services; (2) a national survey of libraries and community technology centers regarding their assistance and training for use of government information and services; and (3) case studies of exemplar libraries and community technology centers to assess their teaching of and support to users with particular emphasis on follow-up of those users to evaluate outcomes and effectiveness of that teaching and support.

These research strategies, supplemented by substantial background research, development of user categories of approaches to government information and services and work with libraries and community technology centers will allow us to report not only user satisfaction with assistance to government information at all levels; but to report on the effective ways in which public libraries and public access computing centers educate and provide services to their users for whom government information can be useful.

The research takes advantage of a partnership between the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science and Pew Research Center, Internet and American Life Project. Pew not only brings its extensive experience in designing and administering surveys of this sort; but also has a sample of individuals already identified in previous Pew studies as low access on which this study will draw. The University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science houses both the Library Research Center and Prairienet, one of the most successful community technology centers in the country.

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Introduction:

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has invited proposals for a project to conduct a research study on how the part of the population with limited access to Internet resources choose to access (traditionally or through the Internet) government services and information from locations other than home, work, or school; and whether such users are satisfied with the information and services they are able to access. The study also is intended to examine the ways that public libraries and public access computing centers provide assistance to users seeking federal, state, and local government information and services.

We take as the overall goal of the project (1) to understand the role of public libraries and community technology centers in making government information available and useful to the public; (2) to assess how effective these services are—how satisfied users are--and (3) to provide widespread dissemination of these findings. We have cast our research in such a way as to focus ultimately on the effectiveness of public libraries and CTCs rather than on levels of user satisfaction. Historically, studies of user satisfaction will show high satisfaction, even when users get wrong or bad information. A focus on user satisfaction could thus yield high levels of satisfaction without telling us much about the core issues involved in this study.

Our research includes a national sample telephone survey supplemented by a sample of known low-access individuals directed by Pew. This will provide information about users and uses of government information at a national level. It will also help identify outlets that these individuals have found to be helpful. The Library Research Center, working with Prairienet, will conduct surveys of public libraries and community technology centers, followed up by case studies of exemplar organizations—ones for which there is evidence of effective training and service. We will also follow up a small segment of attendees of educational programs and seek to identify any programs using outcome based evaluation. Prior to beginning these efforts, however, we see the necessity of some important preparatory work.

In reviewing the request by IMLS, we recognize one of the major challenges is to operationalize “government services and information” in a way that will be intelligible to librarians, community technology center staff and the general public for the purposes of survey design. Government information includes data, tax forms, information about health, water quality, job banks, welfare, food stamp, agriculture and recreation—to name

but a few. Individuals may use government information unaware that it comes from Federal, state or local government. We thus propose two initial steps to the research:

A. First, a “literature” review (broadly interpreted) will examine the current status of knowledge in the uses of and training for government information and services. It will also survey websites, blogs, and organizations related to extending access to and use of government information. Our objective is to summarize what is generally known about provision of and services and training for government information and to inform the next step of the research process.

B. This initial review will also allow us to develop a general taxonomy, a set of categories, of government information and services that can be used in surveys and focus groups of both librarians and the public. We will develop and pre-test this in consultation with IMLS, librarians, community technology center staff, vendors, other government agencies, and—perhaps most important—public users. These preliminary steps, to be carried out in the first 2-3 months of the study, will form a basis for all subsequent work in this project. Our objective is to achieve consensus among the various parties such that our surveys are intelligible to all groups of respondents. Four focus groups—two with librarians and 2 representing other constituencies will provide the opportunity for assessing the extent to which we are achieving this objective. We would also hope that these categories would prove useful in the long-run to individuals conducting similar research on uses of government information.

Approach to Research:

IMLS identifies 5 questions it seeks to answer. We propose to answer them through: (1) a national survey of use of and access to federal, state, and local government information and services with special measures to obtain responses from low income/low access-to-Internet individuals; (2) a national survey of libraries and community technology centers regarding their assistance and training for use of government information and services; and (3) case studies of exemplar libraries and community technology centers to assess their teaching of and support to users with particular emphasis on follow-up of those users to evaluate effectiveness of that teaching and support using outcome measures.

1. What are user preferences for the means of delivery of federal, state, and local government services and information: a) only online; b) only through traditional means of access (walk-in, mail, telephone); or c) both online and through traditional means?

2. Where does the part of the population with limited access to online resources go to get access government information and services?

C. To answer these questions, we propose a national telephone survey of individuals previously identified as having low-access to computing (with a screening question to

assure they still meet that criteria) complemented by a national random sample (RDD) survey. Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. public can be considered to have low access. A telephone survey using Random Digit Dialing (RDD) of 2,000 individuals would yield an estimated 400 low-access users, only a small portion of which are likely to have used libraries or CTC's. Given the current challenges in conducting telephone interviews, a 10-call design would generate a response rate estimated by Pew to be between 30% and 35%. Such a method would allow us to make national estimates, but detailed analysis would be limited by the sample size.

We propose to expand the analytical power to be able to say more about public approaches to obtaining government information and their satisfaction with what they have used. We will use as our sample names of low-access individuals identified in earlier Pew studies. Our expectation is that we will be able to interview 500 low-access users from this approach. This sample of 500 interviews will provide additional analytical power when combined with the 400 completed RDD interviews with low-access users. The elegance of this approach will allow us to weight the 500 callback interviews to the parameters from the 400 RDD interviews (if necessary) to insure consistent analytical data. [We recognize that this project is through a cooperative agreement with IMLS. Should we receive the grant we assume this particular approach may be something to be negotiated between the partners; but at this time we recommend the strategy identified above.]

Individuals will be asked about different categories of need/activity and where they go to find information. After asking about these different categories we will ask them to describe the most recent time they needed information in one of these areas and to talk about how they obtained it. We will also ask about library and ctc use. Finally, we will ask about any training they may have received—formal or informal—about getting government services and information. Those individuals who mention libraries and/or CTC's will be asked to recall the site, if they can. We are aware that questions about uses of government information may be sensitive. The kinds of information available—e.g., healthcare, prison identification numbers, welfare benefits—are kinds about which users may not want to report. Moreover people can be naturally cautious when asked about their relationships to the government, even when the question is “simply” about information or services.

The partnership with two organizations with extensive polling experience--Pew and with the polling organization with which they work, Princeton Survey Research Associates International—gives strength to this proposal. Our objectives include (1) achieving a sufficient response rate to make national inferences; (2) identifying aspects of use of different forms of government information for the population as a whole; and (3) understanding the unique needs for and uses of government information by individuals with low access to computing resources.

3. What kinds of training, classes, tutorials, and reference services (one-on-one, traditional, virtual, or other interactive help mechanisms) do public libraries and public access computing centers provide to assist users in accessing government information and services, and through traditional means of access? What kind of training is available for librarians, educators, and trainers offering the training?

D. To answer these questions, the Library Research Center will conduct a web-based (with postal mail backup) survey of a stratified random sample of 1500 libraries and a universe of community technology centers, with an expected response rate of 60 percent in each category. We intend to pre-test the survey questionnaire to assure we have not overlooked some forms of training or services outside the usual categories and also to assure that librarians and CTC staff understand the range of government information about which we are asking on the survey.

In preparation for our research regarding question 4 (discussed below), we will also ask our respondents about measures they use to evaluate their training and services. Of particular concern to us are any uses of outcome based evaluation. We are particularly interested in identifying these outcome based measures because they could be valuable supplements to our research, should providers be willing to share data. As a supplement to the sample, we will contact directly those libraries and/or CTC's identified by respondents in the national telephone survey. (See C above.)

E. For information about training for the trainers and service providers in libraries, the LRC will survey all state libraries and accredited LIS education programs, and relevant professional associations. For information about CTC training, we will begin with CTCNet and the regional CTC centers to identify training activities. This survey will be augmented by human search of advertisements and notices for such training in the professional literature and a web and database search for information about education, training and services related to government information and its use.

The CTC staff questionnaire will include one or more questions to determine where CTC staff are obtaining their training and on the basis of these answers, we will conduct a follow-up survey, similar to the one for library providers, including questions about any outcome measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs.

Based on the answers to these surveys, the Library Research Center will identify up to 30 exemplar libraries and community technology centers for further study. We are interested in following up on those organizations that (1) provide formal training and/or structured assistance in the uses of government information; (2) ideally, have outcome based evidence of effectiveness; and (3) indicate a willingness to share that information with the research team.

Our objectives in parts D and E of the proposed research are as follows: (1) to achieve a sufficient response rate to enable reliable inferences from our sample to the library population as a whole; (2) to create a comprehensive inventory of training opportunities and services in libraries and CTCs; (3) to begin to identify existing

outcome-based measurements of the effects of these training programs and services on the recipients of training and service.; and (4) to identify “exemplar” libraries and community technology centers for further study.

4. How effective are training, classes, tutorials, and reference services received through public libraries and public access computing centers at increasing the public’s information and government media literacy?

F. The LRC will conduct in-depth telephone interviews with staff members at the exemplar libraries and CTC’s regarding their strategies to increase public information and government media literacy. We will be interested in program design, methods of recruitment, day-to-day services and the staff training that supports these library and CTC activities. We will ask for samples of training materials and reference transactions as well as copies of evaluation materials.

G. Based on information derived from these interviews, the LRC will work with a sub-group of 5-7 libraries and community technology centers to carry out in-depth case studies of how they work with their users to make government information and services available. Of critical importance at this phase is to identify clear and measurable outcomes that these libraries and centers desire. On this basis, we will construct outcome based measures on which we will base our evaluation of the work of these organizations. These studies will involve site visits at the time user training is being conducted; meetings with trainers and users at that time and a request for follow-up with the users approximately 1 week and then 1 month after the training. The LRC will offer a cash incentives to the users for their participation in the follow-up.

Our objectives it steps F. and G. are to identify specific strategies that appear to be effective, based on public responses and self-reports, and to validate these initial findings through observation and interviews with staff, trainers and users.

5. To what extent do public libraries and public access computing centers assist the part of the population with limited access to online resources to access government information and services in the following ways: by providing access itself; by increasing general Internet media literacy; and by assisting with access via traditional means?

These questions will be addressed in the national telephone survey and in the survey of libraries and community technology centers. Achieving the objectives noted in each of the above sections will allow us to answer these questions.

The proposed research will, we believe, provide a deep understanding of answers to the questions raised by IMLS. We also believe our approach will provide several important products that can be of use to community technology centers, libraries and other organizations involved in training. This includes our developing categories of

government information use that may help others be more specific when they talk about information use. More important, we will have identified existing measures and developed new outcome based measures of the effectiveness of library and CTC support for the use of government information and services.

Evaluation

H. At the outset of this proposal we identified the goals of this research. Through the narrative, we have delineated specific objectives of each task that, we believe, can be clearly measured using outcome based evaluation. Our evaluation thus will encompass measuring the outcomes of each task and reporting these regularly to IMLS. We believe this will hold the project accountable at each step of the process, not just at the end; and will also help us identify areas of particular challenge in this kind of research. At the conclusion of the research, we will undertake a review of the (1) effectiveness of the collaboration between the LRC and PEW; (2) management of the project; (3) levels of dissemination, including acceptance of proposals and papers as well as attention of the media; and (4) completeness of response to the questions raised by IMLS.

Plan for Dissemination:

Dissemination of these results will target both the public and professionals. In the first instance, we will draw on Pew's established relationship with the media to disseminate findings of the telephone survey on the Pew website and through press releases. We will also work with Pew on dissemination of the complete research results.

To reach the professional audience, we will submit proposals to present our findings to CTCNet and ALA and or PLA annual conferences and will also write articles appropriate for publication in their professional literature.

Using the Library Research Center website as an established base and a constant URL, we will provide copies of all surveys, focus groups guides and other instruments as well as the results of the study as they become available. As noted above, the Pew website will include data and summaries of findings from the telephone surveys. Links to data on the PEW website will be included on the LRC website. We also anticipate providing the tools for outcome based evaluation of government information services and training for libraries and community technology centers.

Proposed Timetable:

Hiring a project director and assigning key staff to the project will extend over the first few months; but the ongoing Pew and LRC staff will be able to begin working with IMLS upon award of the grant. The formal deliverables are identified above in paragraphs beginning with "A." through "G." We propose to complete them according to the following timetable.

A: review of literature; web resources; and interviews with key individuals (months 1-3)

- B. Development of taxonomy; design and pretesting of questions regarding government information, pre-testing questionnaire; focus groups to build consensus (months 4-6)
- C. Design of national public survey (months 3-4); conduct survey (months 7-8)
- D. Design of survey of librarians and CTC staff (months 3-4); conduct web-based and print survey (months 7-10)
- E. Survey of trainers and training opportunities (months 8-12)
- F. Identification of exemplar libraries (month 11-12); conduct telephone interviews (months 12-14)
- G. Case studies of sub-sample of exemplar libraries, with follow-up of users (months 14-20)
- H. Review and evaluation of findings, preparation of reports, dissemination of findings to public and professional groups. (months 21-24)
- I. Presentation of findings and data (throughout project as soon as they become available)

Management plan:

Leigh , director of the Library Research Center, will assume oversight of the entire project with the assistance of a ½ time project director housed in the Library Research Center. She will be the primary contact with IMLS in assuring coordination. Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, will be responsible for oversight of the national survey and for dissemination with the national and international media and policy circles. Collaborating with them will be Paul Adams, director of Prairienet and Mary Mallory, department head, Government Documents, UIUC Library. The four will work as a team in framing each piece of research and in interpreting the findings. They will meet by conference call or video conference once a month or more frequently as required by the particular phase of research.

Weekly meetings of the LRC staff will assure that staff work is coordinated and that work is being carried out by staff with the necessary expertise. We will, for example, need a graduate assistant with expertise in SPSS programming at certain points in the project. At other times we will be working with the graduate assistant who creates web surveys.

Collaboration between Estabrook and Rainie has begun in the design of this project. We will hold regular telephone meetings, including, as needed, representatives Princeton Survey Research Associates International (see below).

Personnel:

Leigh Estabrook is Professor of Sociology and Library and Information Science and Director of the Library Research Center. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology, M.S. in library and information science and has extensive experience in survey design, focus group research and particularly in conducting research in libraries and of librarians. Her surveys of public libraries and the USA PATRIOT act continue to receive national attention for the importance of their findings. In 2003 she directed an IMLS sponsored workshop on Outcome Based Evaluation and currently works with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to evaluate its LSTA grant fundings.

The Library Research Center has, for over 40 years, conducted research in all types of libraries. The staff members have expertise in sampling, survey design, data analysis programming, and web survey construction and deployment.

Lee Rainie is the Director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a research center that examines the social impact of the Internet—or how people’s Internet use is affecting families, communities, healthcare, education, civic/political life, and work places. Prior to this, Rainie was managing editor of U.S. News & World Report. He is a graduate of Harvard University and has a master’s in political science from Long Island University.

Princeton Survey Research Associates International is an independent firm dedicated to high-quality research providing reliable, valid results. PSRAI offers innovative research design, methodologically-sound procedures, careful supervision of data collection, sophisticated data analysis and clear, insightful and engaging reports. PSRAI has designed and implemented complex research efforts for clients ranging from foundations and non-profits, news organizations to major international corporations. Clients include the Pew Research Center, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *Newsweek* magazine, NBC News and the Knight-Ridder newspapers. Princeton Survey Research Associates was founded in 1989 by Andrew Kohut, after 10 years as President of The Gallup Organization. The team he brought to PSRAI first came together as the core of Gallup's public opinion and methodology divisions

Paul Adams is the Director, Prairienet Community Network and a member of the Board of CTCNet. Prior to that, he was Director Neighbor Services, Champaign, Illinois. Under Adams’ leadership, Prairienet combined forces with the East St. Louis Action Research Project, a program that provides computing resources for low-income communities. In addition to these major projects, Adams also set up a computer lab in the poorest county in Georgia.

Prairienet. Founded in 1993, Prairienet is a member- and donation-supported community information network for Champaign-Urbana and the surrounding East-Central Illinois region, offered as a community service by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Prairienet's mission is to: (1) Strengthen community organizations by helping them provide and

retrieve networked information; (2) Empower individuals by providing access to networked information and by teaching the skills necessary to access and use this information; (3) Facilitate information and resource sharing in support of community development efforts and (4) Promote equity of access to computer resources for everyone in the community.

Mary Mallory is Department Head for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Government Document's Library. The UIUC Library has provided free and unrestricted access to its extensive government documents collections and is proactive library in providing user services on a large scale. Mallory has conducted thousands of reference interviews, interpreted patron information needs, and provided specific answers, assistance and instruction on accessing and using government information to a vast, diverse clientele. She is the author of the section on education and training for "Whitepaper – Government Information in the Electronic Environment," Ad Hoc Committee on the Internet, ALA GODORT,

Budget justification:

The LRC chose Pew on a sole-source basis as its partner and sub-contractor. Our reasons were that only Pew has the kinds of data on low-access users that would allow us to conduct the kind of national sample required by this rfp. As noted above, without the added call-backs individuals previously identified in Pew research as having low-access, we could expect at most 20 percent low-access users in a national sample. In order to gain an understanding of uses of different kinds of government information, we believe we need a much larger number of low-access individuals in our national sample than would be identified only by a general population survey.

Pew contracts with Princeton Survey Research Associates International for the actual calling and the only charges in the sub-contract are for the PRA work. The budgets for each survey are divided roughly into the same parts: design and management, the costs of fielding the interviews, the costs of buying and/or processing the sample and the data processing necessary after the interviewing is completed. There are differences in the costs between the projects because of the differences between RDD and callback surveys, the length of the interviews and the call designs used. Discussions about the research design for this proposal were a negotiation between Estabrook, Rainie and Evans Witte of PSRAI.

National Telephone Survey Project Budget		
	General Population Survey	Callback Survey
Design/Management	\$21,000	\$19,600
Field Costs and Supervision	\$65,600	\$ 34,150
Sample	\$3,300	\$5,550
Data Processing	\$11,100	\$10,600
Total	\$101,000	\$69,900

As co-investigator on the project, Lee Rainie will contribute his time and the resources of his organization to the project. We have not formally included the value of this contribution in the budget, but it is a cost-share by Pew, with no indirect costs assessed against the telephone survey and Pew's contributions.

Notes:

We would hope also to involve CTCNet as an organization in our work, should this proposal be funded. At the time of our writing this grant, CTCNet had committed itself to another proposer.

The proposal does not include an advisory board as such. We would expect the functions of such a board would be taken up by formal collaboration with IMLS, the input from the personnel on this project, and the research activities that involve input and consensus building from the various intermediary providers of government information.