

Illinois State Library

Evaluation of Use of Library Services & Technology Act Funds

FY 2013 - FY 2017

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Evaluation Summary

The Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield evaluated the Illinois State Library's progress toward the goals it established in the long-range plan for use of federal Library Services and Technology funds during FY 2013-FY 2017. Those goals are, in brief, to: 1) provide access to information and ideas for all Illinois residents, 2) provide experiences to support lifelong learning and information fluency, 3) create a reading culture in Illinois, and 4) use innovation and R&D to provide high quality library and information services. During the review period, July 2013 through September 2016, 246 grants and contracts totaling \$16,318,805 in federal LSTA funds and \$8,844,168 in state match were provided to libraries and related entities.

A-1. To what extent did Illinois' five-year plan activities make progress towards each goal?

The first three goals regarding information access, lifelong learning, and a reading culture were fully achieved, and the fourth goal regarding use of innovation and research and development (R&D) was partially achieved.

- Information access was largely accomplished through an initiative called Back to Books, which provided grants to 106 public, academic, and school libraries in all parts of the state. Grants purchased more than 17,000 books and 1,800 CDs and DVDs to enhance libraries' collections. Almost half of the grants focused on children and youth, particularly students, and some of these sought to align with the new requirements of the Common Core learning standards. Other targeted groups included those interested in science, participants in summer reading programs, immigrants, and print-challenged people needing access to large-print editions and audio-visual formats. Generally, libraries reported increased circulation of the new materials purchased with grant funds, although these data were not reported consistently enough to support aggregating that information across libraries.
- To obtain a Back to Books grant, libraries had to design and carry out activities to engage their target audience(s). These activities not only supported information access, but also the Illinois State Library's goals for lifelong learning and reading. The single largest activity category involved grant recipients who offered educational programs around their new library collections, such as computer courses in association with a new collection of computer how-to books and a series of local presentations on healthy lifestyles to encourage use of a new collection on this topic. With few exceptions, libraries did not provide systematic evidence on how well these programs worked, but their impressions were almost uniformly positive.
- Information access was also achieved through a subscription to FirstSearch, which all libraries could make available to their patrons to access online resources. During the review period, FirstSearch handled more than 9,000,000 searches or 8,500 searches a day.
- The Illinois State Library used LSTA funds and match funds to support the operation of its statewide delivery system for sharing resources across libraries. Some 2,000 libraries benefited from this system, which transported more than 40,000,000 items during the review period. Resources were also shared digitally among state government agencies through a subscription to serials provider WT.Cox. In addition, investments were made in the continuing development of the Illinois' Digital Archives.

- The Illinois State Library's main initiative to foster lifelong learning was Project Next Generation, a series of grants to 27 public libraries to use technology and social activities to engage at risk students mostly in 5th through 8th grade. Sixteen of these libraries received grants in all three years of the review period, enabling them to build their efforts over time. Actual numbers of youth who participated in Project Next Generation are not available, but a good estimate would be around 2,000. Some projects were able to report significant gains in participation from year to year, indicating success in their attempts to engage an often challenging population. Most projects took an eclectic approach, exposing youth to different types of technology and social activities to maintain interest. A minority of projects organized activities around a more coherent agenda, in which learning was intended to be cumulative.
- Lifelong learning was also supported through the use of LSTA funds for continuing development of the state's librarian workforce. This included the 2014 version of ILEAD U: Innovative Librarians Explore, Apply, and Discover, which trained librarians in the use of participatory technologies; a statewide conference for librarians on serving people with autism-spectrum disorder; Synergy, a longstanding intensive leadership training program for librarians; the Public Library Management Institute, which trains new library directors; and the Continuing Education for Librarians program, which provides access to some 2,000 online courses. All told, around 1,000 librarians participated in the State Library's professional development programs during the review period.
- The Illinois State Library provided grants to eight projects through public libraries to increase literacy among groups, such as immigrants and prison inmates, with needs in this area. Most of these projects evaluated their outcomes and were able to report measurable gains in literacy among participants.
- Several of the endeavors identified above represented innovative approaches, including Back to Books, Project Next Generation, ILEAD U, and the conference on autism-spectrum disorder. The State Library also devoted grant funds to better efforts to evaluate library services. This included a contract with Counting Opinions to collect and analyze libraries' performance data and participation in Edge, an online management and leadership tool for public libraries. Both ILEAD and the autism-spectrum disorder conference were independently evaluated by UIS' Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies and found to be effective. However, formal evaluation was not done for most initiatives and activities funded with federal LSTA funds or state match.

A-2. To what extent did your five-year plan activities achieve results that address national priorities?

- Of the 246 grants and contracts issued, 108 were either all or partly focused on lifelong learning. Eighteen of these 108 grants sought to improve formal education, while the rest focused on improving general knowledge and skills.
- Information access was the goal of 124 grants. Most of these, 110, aimed to increase users' ability to discover information resources. Fifteen projects explicitly identified obtaining and/or using information resources as their intent.
- Enhancing institutional capacity was the focus of 33 projects. This included the State Library's programs to foster professional development, support for online searching and digital archives, the regional and statewide systems for resource sharing, maintenance of access to resources for people

with disabilities that make reading difficult (see A-3), and programs to bolster performance assessment.

- Economic and employment development was the focus of a handful of Back to Books projects and one Project Next Generation. It was also facilitated through access to business serials provided by WT.Cox.
- Eight grants were associated with Human Services. This included three of the public library literacy projects and four Back to Books projects.
- Six grants focused on civic engagement, including two Project Next Generation initiatives, two Back to Books projects, and ILEAD U.

A-3. Did any groups represent a substantial focus for the five-year plan?

One group constituted a substantial focus under the Illinois State Library's LSTA plan, persons with disabilities. Eighteen Back to Books projects targeted patrons who are print-challenged. The largest commitment to serving the disabled population was support for Talking Books and Braille Services, which operated through statewide and regional systems during the review period. These systems served on the order of 32,000 Illinois residents, with circulation of more than a million audio and braille items. Owing to Illinois' well-known state budget problems, the state began in 2016 to centralize all Talking Books and Braille Services activities in the State Library.

B-1. How was data from the old and new State Program report and elsewhere used to guide activities include in the five-year plan?

Data from the State Program Report allowed for the sorting and analysis of the activity levels and financial resources, including both federal LSTA funds and state match, dedicated to each goal.

B-2. Specify any changes made to the five-year plan.

Activities have mainly focused on statewide initiatives, with limited annual grant competitions. The expectation is that this will lead to larger grant awards to statewide projects and fewer individual grants overall. It is worth noting that some activities in the Long-Range Plan were not funded through LSTA but were carried out by the state using other sources.

B-3. How and with whom have you shared data from the old and new SPR and from other evaluation resources?

Cumulative data has been shared on the Illinois State Library website and during meetings with stakeholders.

C-1. Identify how you implemented an independent five-year evaluation?

The evaluation was carried out by the director of UIS' Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy studies, a Ph.D. with extensive experience in public program evaluation, including previous evaluations for the Illinois State Library.

C-2. Describe the statistical and qualitative methods used in the evaluation?

Owing to the data limitations in grantee project reports, the evaluation relied largely on qualitative methods. All project reports were coded using qualitative analysis software to organize data to address each of the questions in IMLS' evaluation guidelines.

C-3. Describe the stakeholders involved in the various stages of the evaluation.

The evaluation is based on reports provided by all grantees during the review period.

C-4. Discuss how key findings and recommendations from the evaluation will be shared.

The evaluation report will be shared with the Illinois State Library Advisory Council, at meetings with other groups of State Library stakeholders, and the members of Illinois' Congressional delegation. It will also be made accessible to the broader public through the State Library's website.

Evaluation Report

In June 2012, the Illinois State Library (ISL) published its long-range plan for the use of federal Library Services and Technology Act funds during FY 2013-FY 2017. The plan set four goals: 1) providing access to information and ideas for all Illinois residents, 2) providing experiences to support lifelong learning and information fluency, 3) creating a reading culture in Illinois, and 4) using research and discovery, best practices, innovation, and engaging strategies to provide high quality library and information services. This evaluation report covers funded activities directed at achieving these goals between July 2013 and September 2016. During this period, Illinois received \$16,318,805 in federal LSTA funds, and this was matched by state funding of \$8,844,168, for a total financial commitment of \$25,162,973. Funds were put to use through 246 separate grants and contracts to 112 public libraries, 11 academic libraries, 6 school libraries, and two regional library systems, as well as the Illinois State Library itself, either directly or through external contracts.

A. Retrospective Questions

A-1. To what extent did ISL's FY 2013-FY 2017 planned activities make progress toward each of the four goals?

Goal 1: Providing access to information and ideas for all residents (Achieved)

Illinois' LSTA plan calls for addressing this goal through efforts to: 1) provide access, through a variety of means, to quality content and information, 2) share resources across libraries and through access to online databases and repositories, 3) meet the special needs of users, including those who are underserved and have difficulty using libraries, 4) reduce barriers to residents who are print-challenged, and 5) provide access through local, state, regional, national, and international collaborations and networks. Extensive activities were undertaken to realize each of these priorities.

Access to Quality Content and Information

Throughout the period of review, most of ISL's activities, directly or indirectly, sought to provide or improve access to information and ideas. The State Library's most significant commitment to access specifically was its Back to Books initiative implemented in 2013-2014. Back to Books provided grants of up to \$5,000 to libraries that agreed to combine collection development with one or more activities to engage their target audiences. Grants totaling \$431,459 were distributed to 106 libraries in all parts of the state, including urban, suburban, and rural locations. Funds purchased over 17,000 books and 1,800 CDs and DVDs.

Back to Books projects spanned a wide variety of audiences and types of content. The single largest category of projects, representing 52 out of the 106, focused on children and youth, especially students. Ten of these projects were motivated by an interest in providing books and electronic media consistent with the new expectations of the Common Core Standards. Typically, public libraries consulted with local schools on what books to obtain for this purpose. Overlapping some with those ten were 18 (17%) projects that concentrated on increasing the supply of science materials. There were 17 (16%) projects that emphasized exclusively or in part summer reading; summer reading programs were one of the main ways in which libraries attempted to engage their audiences. Another 18 (17%) projects did not focus on a specific audience or type of content, but instead, had a more general thrust, aimed at an array of potential users. Moving in the other direction, a small subset of projects (14, 13%) targeted access to information and ideas of very specific kinds. Topics included home construction, arts and crafts, nursing

skills, history, health, fire safety, folk music, computers, theater, writing, and early childhood. The purchase of materials on these subjects was most often combined with dedicated opportunities for patrons to experience using them.

By and large, measurement of outcomes by Back to Books projects consisted of either claims that circulation had improved as a result of the collection enhancement made possible by the grant or documentation of the same, often done by comparing current circulation to circulation from a prior period. It is not possible to aggregate reported circulation increases, since libraries used different time periods for comparison and how circulation was calculated was not defined. What can be said is that, by and large, Back to Books projects appeared to result in healthy circulation of the materials purchased with grant funds. Some examples will make the point:

- Westchester Library purchased 110 STEM titles, 63% of which were checked out during the reporting period, and 39% of those were checked out more than once.
- Steelville Public Library reported a 71% increase in teen material checkouts during April-June 2014 and a 46% increase in those checkouts during July-September 2014.
- At the Paris Public Library, circulation of juvenile biographies during the grant period increased 240% compared to the same period in 2013.
- At the Mt. Zion Public Library, circulation during the June 1 through August 19 period increased between 2013 and 2014 by 18.6% for juvenile fiction, 57.7% for juvenile non-fiction, and 13.5% for young adult fiction.
- Palos Heights Public Library increased circulation of children's non-fiction by 14% from April through October compared to the same period the year before.

In addition to Back to Books projects, the Illinois State Library used \$3,835,189 in LSTA federal funds across all three years of the review period to increase access to online resources through a subscription to FirstSearch. Between July 2013 and June 2016, FirstSearch handled 9,281,823 searches, an average of 8,500 searches a day, at a cost of 41 cents/search. Academic libraries constituted 63% of searches, public libraries 32%, school libraries 2.4%, and special libraries 2.4%. Digital access was also boosted by the Chicago Public Library. \$1,000,000 in matching funds were used to redesign and improve the usability of the library's website.

Sharing Resources

The Illinois State Library used LSTA and matching funds to help operate the statewide delivery system for sharing tangible materials among libraries. This system consists of the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) serving approximately 1,500 libraries in western and northern Illinois, the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) serving approximately 500 libraries in central and southern Illinois, and the Illinois Library Delivery Service (ILDS), which shares academic and research resources statewide. The three delivery services combined moved more than 40,000,000 items among libraries during the review period, at a cost of \$7,877,969 (federal funds of \$6,113,330 and state matching funds of \$1,764,639), or less than 20 cents/item.

Sharing resources digitally is also part of the Illinois' LSTA plan for accomplishing its access goal. Federal funds were used to purchase access, through a WT.Cox subscription, to print and electronic serials to meet state government needs. Between July 2013 and September 2015, access was provided to full-text articles in more than 180 serials at a cost in federal funds of \$167,138. In addition, hundreds of articles were made available through interlibrary loans.

More than \$700,000 in LSTA and matching funds were used as well to digitize content and make it easier to find. The Illinois-History Digital Imaging program provided \$532,069 in grants using matching funds to 13 libraries to digitize original source materials on Illinois history and culture (e.g., letters, photographs, records) and add them to the Illinois Digital Archives. Matching funds were used to buy a subscription to a content management system (CONTENTdm) for the Digital Archives, which stores close to 500,000 from 180 different collections. A grant of \$125,000 using matching funds was made to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to convert microfilm records of 210,895 newspaper pages to digital, making this content discoverable online for the first time. The Illinois Digital Heritage Hub, a service hub of the Digital Public Library of America, used \$67,534 in matching funds to improve the discoverability, using metadata, of 242,518 items in 338 collections held by 118 Illinois cultural institutions.

Meeting Special Needs

Some groups have difficulty accessing library resources. Children in poor families, urban and rural communities without libraries, and others may be underrepresented among the populations using libraries in Illinois. The state plan calls for activities to improve access for people who have difficulty using a library.

Eleven Back to Books projects focused on providing access to immigrants whose first language is not English. Some of these projects aimed at facilitating the acquisition of English as a second language, while others sought to provide content in people's native language, such as Spanish or Arabic. Two Back to Books projects – one in Indian Prairie, the other in Melrose Park – were specifically directed at fostering the pursuit of citizenship. They combined access to books and audio-visual materials with consultation and instruction on obtaining lawful, permanent residency in the United States. Increasing access for low-income people was the goal of four Back to Books projects. Three of the four projects directed their efforts at children and youth, while the fourth zeroed in on the unemployed and their need to find jobs.

While immigrants and the poor were the focus of most Back to Books projects that considered special needs, there were a few projects with very distinctive aims. The Back to Books project in Atkinson targeted access to relevant materials for children in special or alternative education programs, many of whom are Vietnamese. The Cicero project purchased books and audio-visual materials and organized a film festival for its LGBT community. Greatly increasing the size of its home school collection, along with an open house to promote the collection, was the achieved goal of the project in Fossil Ridge. LSTA grants were also provided to the Orland Park Public Library and the Six Mile Regional Library District to replace books damaged by water disasters.

Print-Challenged Illinoisans

Residents with vision impairments or other limitations that make print reading difficult or impossible meet the definition of a "substantial focus" under IMLS's evaluation criteria. Thus, the Illinois State Library's major efforts to provide access to print-challenged residents are discussed in section A-3 of this report. Here, the focus is on Back to Books projects that directed access activities at residents with vision limitations.

A total of 18 projects devoted some or all of their grant resources to purchasing large-print and audio books for patrons who have difficulty reading print. For example, Norris City bought 203 large-print books, with a particular emphasis on newer titles, while Carrier Mills used all of their grant to obtain 450 new books of interest to older adults, including 175 large-print editions. The Malta Public Library reported high usage of the large-print books they purchase with Back to Books funds, with an average of

3-5 checkouts per item. Among the more interesting Back to Books projects was the Reddick Public Library District's monthly book and reading program for memory care center and nursing home residents with dementia. Books on various countries around the world were used to encourage travel memories. Reddick was able to report measured improvements in levels of communication and understanding among those who participated in the program.

Access through Collaborations and Networks

ISL used mostly match funds to support access for libraries across the state to online catalogues. Match funds totaling \$710,145 covering the last two years of the review period were dedicated to operating the Catalogue Maintenance Center (CMC), which is administered through the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) for the entire state. The CMC improves online catalogue resources through creation of full bibliographic records and elimination of duplicate records. In addition, IHLS received \$10,630 in federal funds to purchase accounting software to support billing and receiving for the 1,200 libraries that are members of the ILLNET/OCLC network. Support was also provided, using \$287,242 in federal dollars, to IHLS' Sharing Heartland's Available Resources Equally (SHARE), a consortium that integrates online catalogues across its 473 member libraries, many of them located into remote, rural areas whose access to resources would otherwise be quite limited. Sixty-nine new libraries were added to the SHARE consortium in FY 15. For the same time period, match funds of \$104,960 were used to pay for the services of The MARC of Quality, a data processing service based in the Florida that updates online catalogue holdings.

Goal 2: Providing experiences to support lifelong learning (Achieved)

ISL's lifelong learning goal emphasizes four priorities: 1) give direct support for education and learning, 2) provide opportunities for professional development for librarians, 3) develop local partnerships that address issues for the greater good, and 4) support activities that accommodate diverse learning needs, especially of those with limited literacy skills.

Direct Support for Education and Learning

All of the Back to Books projects served an educational purpose simply in the sense that the possibility for learning was enhanced through access to more books and audio-visual materials. Some fourteen projects, however, had a more explicitly educational intent. For example:

- Eighty-nine people participated in computer classes that the Maywood Public Library organized to complement the computer books and audio-visual materials purchased with LSTA funds.
- At the Polo Public Library, six staff members learned how to help parents and caregivers prepare their children for reading from the new children's collection.
- Patrons of all ages got to work with the scientific method through their participation in a half dozen hands-on programs that the Julia Hull Public Library conducted to provide exposure to the 115 books and 19 DVDs they acquired through Back to Books.
- Four students joined the new writing program at the Bradley Public Library, as part of the library's effort to support the Common Core Standards.

Education and learning were the dominant purpose of another ISL grant program funded through LSTA. Project Next Generation (PNG), with grants provided in all three years of the review period, supported activities that used technology and social activities to engage at risk students, mostly (although not exclusively) in 5th-8th grades, in learning that supplemented their schoolwork. Twenty-seven public libraries participated in PNG. The majority of these (16) received funding in all three years, thus enabling

them to build on their efforts from one year to the next. Another three received funding across two years. Projects occurred during the school year, and some also continued through the summer.

It is impossible to determine the total number of youth who participated in Project Next Generation based on the way projects reported their work. All projects offered multiple program sessions. Some reported the total number of individuals involved in the project overall; others reported only the number of individuals participating in each session. Also, multi-year projects typically did not attempt to provide an unduplicated count of participants across time. Considering these limitations, a rough estimate of the total number of participating individuals would be in the neighborhood of 2,000. Projects varied dramatically in the size of their participation numbers. Some served in the single digits, while others claimed to reach hundreds, at least with some of their project components. What might account for these differences is not certain, although capacity limits in terms of equipment use was likely one factor. A few projects reported impressive gains in participation from one year to the next. For example, Carbondale Public Library showed an increase of 29 students in its target 5th-8th grade group between FY 2014 and FY 2015, Kewanee Public Library's Project Next Generation grew from 13 in FY 2015 to 99 in FY 2016, and Mississippi Valley grew by 13 percent between FY 2014 and FY 2015.

By and large, projects did not report clear, measurable outcomes for their learning objectives. When they did report outcome data, it was typically along the lines of a statement that a goal – for example, improve technology skills or learn a new skill – had been attained, without providing information on how the goal was measured.

What may be more interesting is the two types of Project Next Generation programs that emerged. The majority of programs took an eclectic approach. These programs exposed students to different types of technology, where the technology was often used as an enjoyable or engaging way to foster social development. For example, the Carbondale Public Library program in FY 2014 offered sessions on photography, Earth Day, and video games; program mentors specifically focused on students' socialization and their level of confidence. The other type of program sought to produce experiences that were less varied but more coherent from a learning perspective. Some examples will show how this worked:

- Across three years of funding, Beardstown, which has a large Hispanic immigrant community, used computers, software, and copying/printing equipment to facilitate students' investigation of the history of their community and families.
- Elmwood Park, a Chicago suburb, focused on ways in which technology could be used to create art, such as photography, videography, and music.
- Engaging students in activities designed to reinforce and complement school-based learning, such as in reading, writing, and math, was the purpose of Kankakee's Project Next Generation.
- During one year of its project, Sparta, a rural community in southern Illinois, created "Flight University," which was an opportunity for 10 to 12 year olds to learn about aviation, with cooperation from the local Civil Air Patrol.
- LaSalle created an opportunity for middle school students to learn about evaluating information provided by the news media, civic freedom, and deciding what to believe.

These projects all deliberately fostered social development, but they do so under the aegis of clearly defined learning objectives.

Professional Development for the Library Workforce

During the review period, ISL used \$403,019 in LSTA funds to provide the state's library workforce with several opportunities for professional development. ILEAD U 2014: Innovative Librarians Explore, Apply and Discover was the fourth cohort of Illinois librarians since 2010 to participate in this nearly year-long creative opportunity to develop skills in the use of participatory technologies. Thirty-four librarians from 25 libraries of varying types formed seven teams to train together and develop interlibrary projects using technology to increase public engagement. An external evaluation found that participants in the 2014 cohort had higher self-reported gains in learning and use of training content compared to the previous three cohorts. Staff from 14 library agencies in other states got to observe the training in the expectation that ILEAD would be replicated in their jurisdictions in the future.

In 2015, ISL conducted a forum on how libraries can assist persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Eighty-two individuals from all types of libraries and some community service agencies heard from experts from around the country on what libraries are doing to adapt and improve their services for this population. A post-forum survey showed that large majorities of participants found the content helpful to very helpful and that the forum boosted awareness of the types of community stakeholders who need to be involved in developing these services and increased librarians' inclination to begin developing or further develop supports for persons with ASD.

In 2015, ISL convened another cohort for its long-running intensive leadership training program for librarians, Synergy. Twenty-nine competitively selected librarians attended three three-day training events, where participants are challenged to develop their leadership skills. Fifty public library directors from across the state attended ISL's Statewide Public Library Management Institute (SPLMI). The Institute provided six days of training for directors on legal issues, budgeting, policy development, program development, disaster planning, building safety, leadership, customer services, and personnel management. Illinois Librarians were also able on a continuing basis to learn from ISL's Continuing Education for Librarians program. Through webinars and self-paced courses on WebJunction, 808 librarians accessed over 2,000 courses between July 2015 and June 2016.

Local Partnerships

Illinois State Library's literacy projects emphasized multi-party local collaborations and are discussed in the next section below. Some of the Back to Books projects used collaboration to advance the interests of their communities. The projects in Indian Prairie and Melrose Park were designed to mobilize interest in helping immigrants in their communities with citizenship. The same could be said of Cicero Public Library's support for the LGBT members of their community. In all three of these cases, the libraries worked with other local organizations to achieve a common goal for the community. Many Project Next Generation initiatives also used a collaborative approach to help their communities address the special needs of less advantaged youth. For example, Champaign's initiative drew on experts from several different local organizations to provide technology instruction to low-income youth. Mississippi Valley Library District executed its project in partnership with the St. Louis Science Center, and there was reason to believe that this partnership would endure beyond LSTA funding. The Decatur PNG collaborated with neighborhood associations, youth sports leagues, and after school programs. A number of PNG projects used mentors from local organizations to teach particular skills and provide social support for participating youth.

Teaching Literacy

One of ISL's LSTA-supported endeavors in FY 2014 provided \$243,100 (plus a \$63,260 match for one project) in funding to eight projects that addressed the literacy learning needs of particular groups. All of these projects were rooted in partnerships of greater or lesser extent.

- Harrisburg Public Library received two grants, one to work with adults with literacy needs, and the other with parents and their children. In the adult initiative, qualified participants from a local Job Corps were trained as volunteer tutors who worked with some 60 low-income young adults struggling with reading and math. Four of those tutored went on to earn their GED, and of 41 who were pre and post tested, sixteen showed improvement. The family literacy program used the Parent and Child Together Activities model to help six low-income parents and their fourteen children promote learning. There were no measurable results reported for the family program.
- LSTA funds were used to support Adult Learning Partners, a 27-year old program housed within the Robinson Public Library. In this initiative, Robinson, along with three other public libraries in the area, trained volunteer tutors from the Robinson Correctional Center to provide literacy instruction for adult learners 17 years of age or older. One hundred and seven volunteer tutors worked with 177 students, most of them inmates in the correctional center. Although this resulted in over 7,800 hours of literacy instruction, no data were provided on its effects.
- The Waukegan Public Library received three grants. One, in which Waukegan partnered with 18 other libraries and organizations in the region, involved 94 volunteer tutors who used an evidence-based literacy curriculum to help 302 adult learners with their basic reading, writing, and math skills. Out of the 302 participants, 101 showed measured gains in learning as a result of 1.5 hours of literacy instruction per week. Waukegan received two grants for family literacy activities, one for families needing to improve their English language skills, and the other for families with non-ESL-related literacy needs. The ESL program, which was a partnership with Round Lake Public Library, involved 34 adults and 46 children, and while skill increases for these families were reported, how these gains were measured was unclear. The non-ESL family literacy program was a collaboration with Literacy Volunteers of Lake County, the College of Lake County, and North Chicago Public Library. It served 21 families, and again, while skill improvements were reported, how these improvements were measured was not specified.

Goal 3: Creating a Reading Culture (Achieved)

This goal has four objectives: 1) engage readers of all ages and abilities, 2) create partnerships that promote reading, 3) develop reading programs for audiences with special needs, and 4) provide services and resources to encourage reading in underserved urban and rural communities.

Reading for Everyone

The Back to Books initiative was the Illinois State Library's principal commitment to furthering reading for all ages. The initiative has already been described at some length above. What may be useful here is to focus more specifically on activities, beyond collection enhancement, that libraries with BTB grants used to bolster reading in their communities. The types of activities employed fall into five categories, and some libraries resorted to more than one type of activity.

Twenty BTB grantees used what might be considered traditional methods to call attention to their enhanced collections. These methods consisted of book displays, newsletter and local media announcements, Facebook postings, letters to patrons, and highlighting the new books in the course of other library staff business. Another seven libraries organized specific events to promote their new collections. For example, the Nokomis Public Library hosted a Good Book for Dessert event at which

their new audio and large-print books were promoted, and cake and drinks were served to those who attended. Three grantees used contests to entice use of their collections. These were targeted at children and youth. Two involved either keeping a public record of how many books from the collection each child read, and the third used a guessing game to encourage children to access its new biography collection for K-5 students.

By far, the method used most often to try to get people to check out new collections was to connect a collection, typically on a particular topic or range of topics, to a program or series of programs in real time on the same topic or topics. Sixty-three libraries employed this method. Programs generally took two forms. One form specifically incorporated new books or content from new books in the program itself. The other was more general, with the program covering the same topic but not invoking specific books from the collection. An example of the first type was Heartland Community College's purchase of books for its course on western civilization since 1500. The books were specifically promoted by the college library as worthwhile resources for the students to use in meeting course requirements. An example of the second type was a series of educational programs on health topics organized by the Charleston Public Library. The series generally referred to the library's new "get healthy" collection but did not specifically incorporate items from the collection in presentations.

The fifth category of reading promotions consisted of more novel or unique approaches. The Lake Villa Public Library District visited local businesses with its mascot, a fiberglass cow, and posted pictures of the visits on social media in order to call attention to the new collection of 48 books on starting and running a business. The Bloomingdale Public Library organized an opportunity on the ground floor of its facility for local literacy service providers to set up tables to explain their services to new English speakers in the community. This activity went along with the library's new collection of ESL materials. The Fossil Ridge Public Library promoted its new homeschooling collection by arranging an open house at which all 307 new books were laid out on tables for the 85 people in attendance to review.

Promoting Reading through Partnerships

Back to Books projects mostly fostered reading through their own initiative. Many projects had some partners, but they were usually individuals who made presentations at programs. And their presentations were typically designed to provide information rather than to encourage reading *per se*. However, there were exceptions to these norms, in which a library joined with one or more other community partners for a pro-reading purpose.

- Sallie Logan Public Library partnered with local craftspeople to promote community engagement with the library's new collection of 287 crafts books. The library reported a 78% increase in the circulation of nonprofit books by the second month of the project.
- Lake Villa Public Library partnered with the local Chamber of Commerce and Small Business Development Center to encourage local people to use the library's new collection of 48 business books.
- The Moline Public Library teamed up with a Lowe's Home Improvement Center and a True Value Hardware to promote use of the library's new collection of 165 books and 29 DVDs on home improvement topics. Three-fourths of the materials were checked out during the six-month project.
- Eastern Illinois Community College partnered with a local talk radio show to launch Just READ It, a program to encourage local people to check out the library's new varied collection of books and audio-visual materials. The library experienced an 18.5 percent increase in patrons during the project.

Audiences with Special Needs

Many of ISL's efforts to foster reading among groups with special needs have already been described. All Project Next Generation initiatives were directed at low-income youth. Likewise, all of the literacy projects discussed under "Teaching Literacy" above were aimed at people with low or limited literacy. In addition to those projects, eight Back to Books projects sought to boost literacy levels among adults, typically English language learners. Many of these adults would likely have had limited incomes as well. Seven Back to Books projects also included reading opportunities specifically for low-income people among their objectives. As previously noted, 18 Back to Books projects all or in part used grant funds to purchase large-print and audio books to meet the needs of the print-challenged, usually senior citizens. Eleven of the Back to Books grantees were colleges who used grant funds mostly to meet student needs; in one case, a college developed a book collection that was also accessible to the surrounding community. Early childhood literacy was the focus of three projects. All told, efforts targeting special needs, not counting those specifically focused on people with disabilities, which will be discussed later, involved \$1,255,357 in grants across the three years, or 5% of total funding. If programs for those with disabilities are included, the proportion of funding committed to all special needs represented 25% of the total.

Reading for the Underserved

It is not possible to specifically identify underserved urban and rural communities that were helped by support from ISL through funding provided by LSTA. That said, the vast majority of rural and urban libraries that received grants were in locations with larger than average low-income populations and/or larger than average senior populations. Rural libraries appeared likelier to serve more older people and urban libraries more low-income people, although undoubtedly there were older people who were also poor in both types of locations. For people with limited income, public libraries would be about the only way to obtain books and magazines. Out of the 27 Project Next Generation initiatives, nearly all of which entailed interacting with "cool" technology to foster engagement with the written word, nine were in rural locations and nine were in urban locations. Across all grantees for all three years, 45 libraries in rural communities secured one or more grants, while 21 libraries in urban communities were funded.

It may be worth citing a few examples to show how funds were used to foster reading engagement in urban and rural areas whose residents might otherwise have had difficulty gaining access to materials:

- Champaign's Project Next Generation initiative was specifically focused on low-income youth, and its Back to Books grant was directed at one library branch located in an area with a high number of low-income African American youth.
- Waukegan received support from all three of ISL's main LSTA-funded grant programs: Back to Books, Project Next Generation, and Literacy. Its activities under all three of these efforts were aimed at fostering reading literacy among the more than half of its population who are Hispanic/Latino, and many of whom are also low-income.
- Waukegan used its Back to Books grant to encourage reading through its adult book club. This was something of an exception to the norm. Most book clubs – 8 out of the 12 identified in grantee reports – were located in suburban areas.
- Galatia in rural southeastern Illinois held book talks, with the help of a local high school English teacher, to encourage students whose desire to read may have slackened. Students were able to earn extra credit by participating. The talks focused on books that had recently been made into movies.
- Red Bud, located in rural southwestern Illinois, used Back to Books funding to expand its collection of large print, audio, and adult fiction and nonfiction books to meet the needs of its older patrons.

- Located in a rural area west of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, the Malta Public Library was able with Back to Book funds to purchase twice as many audio books for senior readers with vision difficulties than it has anticipated, owing to its success in obtaining a 50% discount from the publisher.

Illinois residents who are print-challenged would likely have had to go without reading materials were it not for ISL's investment in Talking Books and Braille Services. This effort will be discussed below in Section A-3.

Goal 4: Using Innovation and R&D (Partly Achieved)

Four objectives have defined ISL's pursuit of its goal to produce highly quality library and information services through research and discovery, best practices, innovation, and engaging strategies: 1) test new approaches to more fully realize the first three goals regarding access, lifelong learning, and reading, 2) engage users, particularly through the online environment, in evaluating trends impacting libraries, 3) encourage innovative ways to meet the library needs of people from diverse geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural background; and 4) seek out best practices to improve the quality of and access to library and information services.

Testing New Approaches

Both the Back to Books and Project Next Generation initiatives represented creative ways to engage the wide cross-section of Illinois residents in reading and learning. In both cases, the traditional more passive role of the library as an accessible repository of content was replaced by a more proactive role in which access was usually linked to larger purposes. Many Back to Books projects used the library as a vehicle for social development based on the particular interests of a community – from citizenship preparation for immigrants to guidance on making home improvements. The interests varied because communities vary. The intent was to get libraries to think beyond just providing access to seeing access as a pathway toward meeting other community needs. Project Next Generation featured the library as a context for motivating less advantaged youth to see potential for themselves in the technological future. The several literacy projects, while limited in their geographic reach, were direct interventions to foster the development of human capital, in this case among people whose limited literacy skills needed strengthening.

ILEAD U and the forum on serving persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were innovative actions to better prepare librarians for effectiveness in the changing world in which we live. Communication and information access are being dramatically changed by technology, which shifts and morphs with each passing day. ILEAD not only showed librarians what's on the changing menu of technologically mediated communication, but how to use these technologies to facilitate the meeting of people's needs for information and connection. The ASD forum introduced libraries to a growing underserved population whose development and better integration into society libraries are in good position to facilitate.

Evaluating Trends

ISL used \$179,682 in LSTA funds to contract with Counting Opinions to collect and analyze data on Illinois libraries for each year of the review period. Through Counting Opinions' products, public libraries were able to conduct and upload performance assessments and then have access to real-time data for their own purposes. ISL used Counting Opinions for two statewide data collections: Illinois Public Library Annual Report (IPLAR) and ILLNET interlibrary loan statistics. The number of public libraries uploading their performance data for IPLAR was 637 in fiscal 2014, 638 in fiscal 2015, and 643 in fiscal 2016 –

essentially all. The number of public, academic, school, and special libraries that provided interlibrary loan data was 700 in fiscal 2014, 477 in fiscal 2015, and 1,844 in fiscal 2016.

In the second year of the review period, ISL used \$60,000 in state match funds to subscribe to Edge, an online management and leadership tool for public libraries developed by the Urban Libraries Council with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Edge sets benchmarks for public access technology in the areas of community value, engaging the community and decision makers, and organizational management. To receive a state funded per capita grant in fiscal 2016, public libraries were required to complete the Edge assessment, and all public libraries participated. The assessment describes the current state of a library's technology and provide guidance on how to improve its accessibility and useful to the community.

Innovation to Meet Diverse Needs

ISL's efforts to use creative ways to meet the needs of Illinois residents from diverse backgrounds have already been amply described above. To reiterate, Back to Books, Project Next Generation, and literacy initiatives all were specifically designed to accommodate needs of different groups of people. Both Project Next Generation and the literacy projects were specifically for particularly underserved populations. Back to Books did not specify groups that should be served, but communities through their own initiative devised programs that took into account the needs of their particular populations, including those with limited access to or experience in using the public library. The forum on library services for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder was also an innovative way to raise awareness and understanding of the special needs of this population. It did so by not just providing information, but also by convening librarians together to discuss relevant issues and develop a sense of common purpose. And then, we will be considered in detail later in this report, ISL devoted considerable resources to providing statewide access for people who are blind or have significant vision limitations, a group that might otherwise be marginalized in the information economy.

Improving Quality

Both the Counting Opinions Initiative and the Edge assessment sought to generate information that the ISL and individual libraries can use to evaluate their work and make improvements in the quality of the services they offer. ISL also used \$78,967 in LSTA funds to pay for the services of a consultant to support the state's online system for libraries to certify their compliance with state statutes and statewide agreements on interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing. All libraries participated in the certification system.

For two of ISL's professional development initiatives for librarians, evaluations were conducted that provided useful feedback on the usefulness of these programs. ISL conducted its own evaluation of Synergy, its intensive leadership training program. That evaluation produced findings consistent with prior evaluations showing the program to be perceived as highly beneficial, as a form of personal development, for the librarians who get to participate in it. An independent evaluation of ILEAD U was conducted by the Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS). UIS has been the evaluator of ILEAD since it started in 2010. As previously noted, the evaluation of the 2014 ILEAD program found that participants reported more learning and use of content from their training experiences compared to previous cohorts.

While during the review period ISL invested in some very important efforts to evaluate and improve the quality of library services in Illinois, most of the initiatives it supported with LSTA funding and/or state matching were not subject to systematic evaluation. The project reporting system has improved since

the state's last LSTA evaluation. However, there is still no consistency in how grant recipients report on the effects of their projects. Findings were often limited to impressions (e.g., patrons are excited about the new collection) or counts (e.g., number of people attending a program), which, while meaningful to a degree, are not robust enough to serve as useful feedback in considering how to further improve library service quality.

A-2. To what extent did ISL's FY 2013-FY 2017 planned activities achieve results that address national priorities?

During the review period, ISL provided grants that addressed all six of the "measuring success focal areas" and their underlying intents. Most attention was given to lifelong learning and information access, followed by institutional capacity. Economic and employment development, human services, and civic engagement were addressed, but not nearly to the same extent as the first three. Many activities addressed more than one focal area or intent. It should also be noted that, when completing progress reports, projects did not always accurately record their focus and intent(s).

Lifelong Learning

Of the 246 grants issued during the review period, 108 were either all or partly focused on lifelong learning. The intent to improve formal education was a focus of 18 projects. That includes all seven of the literacy initiatives, plus four Back to Books projects and three Project Next Generation initiatives. All four of the Back to Books Projected used funding to obtain books needed to meet the specific curricular requirements of institutions of higher education. Many other Back to Books projects aimed at increasing access to and use of reading materials useful to education (e.g., consistent with Common Core expectations), but these efforts did not appear to be aligned with specific educational objectives. While all of the Project Next Generation initiatives had an educational purpose, only a few were explicitly tied to middle or high school curricula. The most notable of these was Kankakee, which specifically focused on increasing reading, writing, and math skills.

Although improving formal education was the aim of relatively few projects, the same could not be said for improving general knowledge and skills, which was the intent of 100 of the funded projects. Included among these are 23 of the Back to Books projects and all Project Next Generation initiatives. It also covered ISL's efforts to provide access to reading materials through Talking Books and Braille Services, which will be elaborated on in the next section of this report.

How well grantees satisfied the intent to improve formal education or general knowledge and skills cannot be adequately assessed, since few projects attempted to measure their actual success beyond impressions of user satisfaction. The exception was some of the literacy initiatives, as described previously.

Information Access

Information access was the focus of 124 grants, half of the total grants awarded during the three-year review period. The vast majority of these efforts, 110, targeted increasing users' ability to discover information resources. Discovery was named as an intent of all Back to Books projects, the FirstSearch online search access available to all libraries in the state, and the WT.Cox subscription that provided searched serials access to state government. In addition, discovery was an important purpose of Beardstown's Project Next Generation, which encouraged students to use the library and online

searching to unearth information about the history of their community. Also, the 13 digital imaging projects supported by state match funds were an effort to digitize content to make it more “discoverable.”

Obtaining information was, in a sense, an intent of most projects across the three-year period. However, only 15 projects specifically identified this as an intent of their efforts. This included the Talking Books and Braille Services projects that will be discussed below, the regional and statewide resource sharing delivery systems, FirstSearch, WT.Cox, the newspaper digitization project, ISL’s acquisition of copper plates of maps of Illinois produced by U.S. Geological Services, replacement of two library’s book collections destroyed by water damage, and Aurora’s literacy project, which emphasized access to literacy resources.

Institutional Capacity

Enhancing institutional capacity within the broad library system in the state was the focus of 33 projects. Eight of these projects included among their purposes improving the library workforce. ILEAD, Synergy, the autism forum, attendance at the 2015 Digital Public Library of America conference (DPLAFest), management training for new library directors, and continuing education for librarians represented significant commitments to workforce development. While an unduplicated count of librarians who participated in ISL’s workforce development activities cannot be calculated, in total these activities directly reached around 1,000 librarians during the review period.

LSTA and state match dollars funded twelve projects to improve physical and technological infrastructure. This includes subscriptions to FirstSearch and WT.Cox, the regional and statewide resource sharing delivery systems, statewide Talking Book and Braille Services (including submachine lending), online catalogue maintenance, support for the Illinois Digital Archives, the metadata project for DPLA, and a project by the Chicago Public Library to integrate its catalogue and other third party applications with its website.

Improving library operations was the intent of thirteen grants. The regional and statewide resource sharing delivery systems count here, as do Talking Book and Braille Services and catalogue maintenance. Also included are ISL’s use of Counting Opinions and participation in Edge to facilitate library performance assessment, ISL’s library certification program, and the use of MARC of Quality to update the catalogue.

Economic and Employment Development

Improving library users’ ability to use resources and apply information for employment support was included among the named intents of five grants. Three Back to Books grants focused on employability. Sauk Valley Community College used its funding to purchase print and audio books and DVDs to be used in its associate degree and certificate programs leading, in part, to qualification for local employment in area businesses. Astoria Public Library obtained non-fiction materials to provide better resources for people looking for employment. Bellwood Public Library purchases books on resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills, job searching, and career exploration. The Aurora Public Library’s literacy initiative was explicit about helping refugees and immigrants acquire English language skills that would make them more employable. Pekin Public Library’s Project Next Generation used mentors to teach youth participants about the role of creative skills in the job market and the types of careers those skills can support.

Four grants explicitly addressed the focal area of economic and employment development. The WT.Cox subscription intentionally included access to business-related serials, including, but not limited to, transportation and agriculture, the focus of two state agencies. Lake Villa Public Library's Back to Books grant purchased books relevant to developing local, small, and home-based businesses and featured these works during programs at the local Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center. Sauk Valley's Community College Back to Books grant not only supported education that could lead to employment, it also gave attention to business development. The Zion Benton Public Library's Project Next Generation initiative introduced students to the topic of business management and encouraged them to contemplate becoming entrepreneurs.

Human Services

Eight grants supported activities associated with human services. Harrisburg's family literacy grant addressed all three intents within this focal area: one program used a hands-on experience to teach families about household budgeting; in another a university nutritionist taught families about food safety, good groups, exercise, and gardening; in a third program guest speakers spoke on parenting topics. The last two programs involved multiple sessions spanning several weeks. Health and wellness were the focus of two Back to Books Projects. The Charleston Public Library targeted the high level of obesity in its county by purchasing materials and conducting programs that encouraged healthy lifestyles. The public library in Hinckley purchases educational books and DVDs in support of the local Fitness and Nutrition for Everyone project. The two family literacy projects in Waukegan (one for immigrant families, the other for non-immigrant families) and the literacy project in Aurora used the Parent and Child Together activities model to further parenting skills. Parenting was also promoted through Back to Books grants to the Astoria Public Library and Pekin Public Library.

Civic Engagement

Six grants either all or in part focused on civic engagement. The most direct of these was Decatur's Project Next Generation initiative. Teaching about civic responsibility provided substantive focus for this project. One segment was devoted to learning about and understanding the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. Another taught students about computer operating systems while engaging them in discussion and analysis of the 2016 presidential campaign and what issues they would like to bring before the local city council. LaSalle's Public Library's Project Next Generation taught students about becoming digital citizens, using e-learning applications and other technology to increase news and information literacy. The Back to Books grants for the Indian Prairie and Melrose Park Public Libraries were used to develop the citizenship skills of new immigrants and refugees. ILEAD, ISL's participatory technologies training program, was explicit about how these technologies can be used to bolster democratic capability.

A-3. Did any groups represent a substantial focus for ISL's Five-Year Plan activities?

Out of the ten groups listed in IMLS' evaluation guidelines, one received at least 10% of total resources (federal plus state match) during the three-year review period: individuals with disabilities. Out of the \$25,162,973 in expenditures, \$4,736,195 (18.8%) was devoted to services and programs designed to benefit persons with disabilities. Nearly 98% of spending went toward services for people who are blind or have related difficulties reading print. That included \$947,714 in state match.

There are several components to Illinois' services to provide those with low vision, blindness, or other physical disability with access to reading materials:

- ISL operates the Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS) as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. In 2014, ISL used \$29,911 in LSTA funds to purchase 1,200 reusable cartridges to duplicate books on tape, mostly older, classic works that the National Library Service has been unable to convert. In fiscal 2015, ISL used state match of \$477,974 to manage the statewide TBBS. This included providing support to the regional systems described below. In total, TBBS provided services to 16,500 Illinois residents involving the circulation of 793,150 items, 66,095/month. In fiscal 2016, management of TBBS was maintained with \$5,360 in LSTA federal funds and \$469,740 in state match. Annual circulation dropped to 762,000, 63,500/month. Illinois talking book patrons read an average of 45 books a year per person.
- The TBBS administered through the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) operated the Illinois Machine Sublending Agency (IMSA) for the state. IMSA maintained an inventory of 3,775 machines (cassette, advanced digital, and standard digital) and loans machines for individuals with visual impairments to use in downloading items. In fiscal 2014, 353 machines were sent to patrons, and IMSA assisted 138 people access downloadable books in braille or audio. On average, 334 downloadable items circulated a month. This was paid for through \$225,196 in LSTA funds. In fiscal 2015, with \$290,187 in LSTA support, IMSA loaned 3,682 machines, with monthly circulation of 347 items. The agency also undertook a special outreach effort in the southern-most part of the state, where awareness of available services tends to be low. In fiscal 2016, IMSA used \$275,337 in LSTA funds to loan 3,418 machines, generating a monthly circulation of 285. The reason for the drop-off in circulation compared to the prior two years was unclear.
- ISL also directed funding to the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) to operate the Illinois Talking Book Outreach Center, which served all of the state outside of Chicago. The outreach center maintained a staff of reader advisors who work directly with patrons throughout Illinois to recommend books and help them access the services they need to download what they want. The RAILS Talking Book Center (TBC) received \$517,587 in LSTA funds in FY 2014. This supported service access for 12,038 patrons, downloads of 92,658 audio books, 410 audio magazines, and 3,358 books and 79 magazines in refreshable braille. In FY 2015, RAILS TBC was given \$622,309 in federal funds, and its services were used by 11,878 patrons (including 1,367 new members) who downloaded 88,277 audio books and 3,583 audio magazines, and 6,630 books and 338 magazines in refreshable braille. TBC staff also carried out several outreach activities to promote their services to various groups. In FY 2016, with \$622,309 in LSTA funds, RAILS TBC served 11,729 patrons. Because of protracted uncertainty about the state budget, RAILS phased out of download support and concentrated instead on its reader advisor services, which handled 25,730 phone calls, letters, emails, and walk-ins. It also made presentations about TBBS at 46 events and meetings.
- ISL supported a Talking Book Center at the Chicago Public Library (CPL), as well. In fiscal 2015, CPL's center served 3,301 Chicago residents, circulating 135,653 books and other materials, or 11,304/month. The library conducted wide variety of outreach activities focused on different groups, operated summer and winter reading programs for those with rely on talking books, and sponsored a book club for the same population. This work was supported with \$257,226 in federal LSTA funds and \$275,00 in state match. In fiscal 2016, the efforts of Chicago's Talking Book Center were funded with \$532,226 in federal support. CPL targeted adult talking book patrons with a series of book clubs. It circulated 92,567 books, 7,714/month, a fairly substantial decline from fiscal 2015. The reason for this drop is not clear.

In addition to the state's commitment to TBBS, a number of Back to Books projects focused on serving those who were print-challenged, as has already been described. These efforts provided large-print and audio selections. Since libraries did not report separately on the number of print-challenged patrons served, the grants' effects on this population cannot be determined. It should be noted, however, that nearly all of the Back to Books grantees who reported serving the print-challenged are located in rural areas where, in Illinois, the population tends to be older, and thus, where the need for large-print and audio materials would likely be higher.

Owing to Illinois' lack of a state budget, resulting in a loss of state funding for ISL, the CPL and IHLS Talking Book and Braille Services programs were stopped in fiscal 2016, and the RAILS program will come to a close at the end of fiscal 2017. ISL's TBBS is assuming responsibility for all services previously offered through these other systems.

B. Process Questions

B-1. How have you used data from the old and new State Program Report and elsewhere to guide activities included in the Five-Year Plan?

The data from the State Program Report (SPR) allowed for the sorting and analysis of the activity levels and financial resources dedicated to each goal. Having the match projects included in the SPR was beneficial to have comparative data for categorizing state funded and LSTA projects as a whole.

Data confirmed that over 50% of grant funds support the number one priority of access to information. It was unexpected to discover that while more projects targeted specific groups, for example youth, the cumulative funding for targeted groups was often below the threshold for reporting "groups that represent a substantial focus" in the Five-Year Evaluation. Therefore, when looking at the financial commitment as a whole, the general population of Illinois residents emerged as a major emphasis, whereas targeted audiences did not get as much attention as might be desired. Better identification of specific target audiences is an underlying strategy as the next Five Year Plan is developed.

B-2. Specify any changes you made in the Five-year Plan, and why this occurred.

While both general and targeted strategies were included in the Five-Year Plan, activities primarily focused on statewide initiatives with limited annual competitive grant offerings. Expectations are that the Five-Year Evaluation will show a trend towards larger awards for statewide projects with fewer grants awarded to fewer agencies. Because of the lack of a state budget in Illinois, legislative appropriation/spending authority was delayed for the State Library and other state agencies, which included the authorization to allocate grant funds both of the past two fiscal years. This delay impacted the State Library's timeline to award grants, which in turn affected the capacity of subgrant agencies to administer projects in a timely manner. As a result, statewide projects were more practical than competitive grant offerings.

One of the interesting quirks of the current Long Range Plan was the realization that some activities were conducted as planned, but no grant funds were used to support them. 1) The Illinois Veterans History Program was hosted with over 150 attending annually, but it did not rely on federal or match dollars; in addition, annual grants awarded to Illinois' Veterans' Homes libraries were generated from fees paid for special license plates commemorating Veterans. 2) The Illinois State Library as well as the

regional library systems provided ongoing in-kind and technical support for the videoconferencing network for collaboration and to engage library staff. 3) The number of libraries applying for adult literacy grants decreased as local capacity to administer the projects generally decreased. While applications from businesses and non-library agencies applying for adult literacy grants continued to be awarded, only libraries were eligible for LSTA and match funds. Even though these activities focused on appropriate target audiences or intents of the Plan, the use of LSTA or match funds was not warranted.

Evaluation was scheduled at years one, three and five, but this was not realistic. The Five-Year Evaluation covers grant activities between July 2013 and September 2016, not five years. Evaluation would have been more efficient on a flexible schedule to accommodate when the activities occurred rather than based on years one, three and five. The next plan will emphasize evaluation, but the intent is to gather data for an annual assessment and an overview of the impact and use of grant funds.

B-3. How and with whom have you shared data from the old and new SPR and from other evaluation resources?

Cumulative data is shared on the State Library's website and during meetings with stakeholders. The list of top 20 projects funded annually is posted on the ISL website to show the use of grant funds. The intent is to add documents to the LSTA website starting with the current year to document how funds were used under each goal and for which target audiences.

C. Methodology Questions

C-1. Identify how you implemented an independent Five-Year Evaluation using the criteria described in the guidance.

The State Library contracted with the Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield. The evaluation was carried out by the director of the Institute, Dr. David Racine, who is also the executive director of the larger unit of which the Institute is a part, the Center for State Policy and Leadership. Dr. Racine has been the independent evaluator of the ILEAD program since its start, conducting five evaluations of this initiative between 2010 and 2016. He also oversaw the evaluation of ISL's implementation of its FY 2008-FY 2012 LSTA Plan. Dr. Racine has extensive experience as an evaluator of public programs and is competent in the use of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods.

C-2. Describe the types of statistical and qualitative methods used in conducting the Five-Year Plan evaluation. Assess their validity and reliability.

The evaluation has relied exclusively on qualitative methods owing to data limitations that preclude the use of more rigorous quantitative methods. Data were drawn from grantee project reports, which, while often rich in descriptive detail, were inconsistent in their use of quantitative data. Some grantees provided no numerical evidence on the effects of their efforts. Many others did provide this evidence but not in a consistent enough way to afford comparisons across grantees. Also, although all project reports indicated the goals and intents projects were based on, the data collected was often not aligned sufficiently with these specific aims to permit a quantitative assessment of the extent to which they were achieved. Consequently, the evaluation turned to qualitative methods.

A possibility considered and rejected was to do a systematic case comparison analysis. For the three competitive grant offerings – Back to Books, Project Next Generation, and literacy, comparing projects within each offering on relevant dimensions (e.g., target populations, specific focus) would have been a useful way to evaluate performance. However, for two of these efforts, Back to Books and Project Next Generation, there were simply too many cases (i.e., projects) to compare with the time and resources available. Plus, as just noted above, data was limited and inconsistent, making comparisons a challenge.

Instead of case comparison, all 246 grants were treated as if they were informants in an ethnography. The grant reports were uploaded into Atlas Ti, a qualitative analysis software program that supports coding documents. Several codings were conducted. A first coding was done, without regard to IMLS' evaluation guidelines, to focus on what grantees themselves sought to emphasize about their efforts. In other words, codes were derived from, rather than imposed on, the texts of the 246 reports. This initial inductive coding found, for example, that 29 grants focused on activities connected, strongly or loosely, with defined educational curricula and that 75 projects were oriented to providing people with how-to information, that is, content that could be used for a purpose beyond itself. All of the codings after the first followed the logic of IMLS' three retrospective evaluation questions. Each question served as the basis for a separate coding of all 246 reports. So, one coding evaluated projects in terms of the four goals in ISL's Five-Year Plan, another the Measuring Success focal areas, and the third the attention given to particular groups. The results of all four codings were then used to generate responses to the three questions.

Qualitative methods are not subject to precise determination of their validity and reliability, since this requires measurement. It is more appropriate to judge these methods in terms of their credibility (are the findings produced by such methods believable?) and the degree to which they explain the situation being evaluated. In the current evaluation, credibility has been pursued by sticking as close as possible to what grantees themselves reported and limiting the extent to which the evaluator imposed categories on the findings or attempted to judge grantee performance based on external standards (e.g., projects should have achieved a circulation increase of X%). The evaluation used the four codings to, in a sense, produce four different layers of understanding what grantees did with the financial support they received. This painted a more complete picture than would have been possible with fewer codings.

C-3. Describe the stakeholders involved in the various stages of the Five-Year Evaluation and how you engaged them.

The report has been based on annual reports submitted by the recipients of the 246 grants and contracts issued during the review period. All of these reports followed a common format. During the time in which grants and contracts were in place, ISL encouraged projects to provide feedback on success and challenges through quarterly reporting.

C-4. Discuss how you will share the key findings and recommendations with others.

The evaluation report will be shared with the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee at its regularly scheduled meeting in April 2017. The Committee advises ISL in the development of state and federal library plans; provides input in addressing policies, issues, and activities for library development and cooperation among different types of libraries; makes recommendations concerning the evaluation of statewide services; and addresses the use of technology to expand access to information for Illinois

citizens. Additionally, at meetings with other stakeholders, the State Library Director's report will include the results of this latest LSTA evaluation.

The final evaluation document will be posted on the ISL Library Services and Technology Act web page. Key findings and recommendations with a link to the full evaluation will be announced in the State Library's electronic newsletter, E-News. Also, the report will be shared with all of the members of Illinois' Congressional delegation.