**Further Guidance on the FY 2012 “Five-Year” Evaluation Reports from SLAAs**

We are in a two-year transition period of improving evaluation protocols so that we can ensure that our programs are effective and respond to federal and state requirements. During this transition, state library administrative agencies (SLAAs) will submit five-year evaluation reports. A major objective of the five-year evaluation reports is to help state libraries transition to new evaluation protocols. The purpose of this document is to clarify the requirements and objectives for the five-year evaluation reports and place them in the context of the transition to new evaluation protocols.

**What are the new evaluation protocols?**

Grants to States is a state-grant program authorized under the Library Services and Technology Act. The Act identifies eight priorities and requires SLAAs to submit five-year evaluation reports (due March 2012) and five-year plans (due June 2012). Lack of specific evaluation protocols has made it difficult to analyze the data and assess the national impact of the program and its public benefit. In response, IMLS is working collaboratively with the SLAAs to develop new evaluation protocols that better produce short-term and long-term outcome-based data to assess the effectiveness of funded activities

**How does the upcoming five year evaluation report fit into the larger process for transitioning to new evaluation protocols?**

The next five-year evaluation reports are due in the middle of the transition process to the new evaluation protocols. In developing guidance for the five-year evaluation reports, IMLS reviewed the requirements of the Library Services and Technology Act and considered strategies for using the evaluation reports as a way to assist SLAAs to transition to the new evaluation protocols. These guidelines are intended to help tighten the consistency of reporting across the SLAA evaluation reports to enable IMLS to tell a national story about the impacts of activities on the national public wellbeing. The guidelines are also intended to assess and improve the ability of the SLAAs to use outcome-based evaluation currently and to transition to reformed standards when the transition is complete. The new protocols continue the spirit of developing evaluation protocols that are of use to SLAAs within their jurisdictions as well as across jurisdictions.

The guidelines for the five-year evaluation are organized around three specific issues:

* Highlighting effective past practices (“Retrospective Questions”)
* Identifying processes at work in implementing the activities in the plan, including the use of performance-based measurements in planning, policymaking, and administration (“Process Questions”)
* Developing key findings and recommendations from evaluating the past five years for inclusion in the next five-year planning cycle (“Prospective Questions”)

One complexity that each SLAA will have to address in conducting the five-year evaluations is that some of the information needed to address the prospective questions will not be available until the evaluation plan for the new evaluation protocols is completed next September. However, SLAAs can start the evaluations now rather than waiting until September.

**How can SLAAs follow up with IMLS for further questions?**

A webinar is scheduled for next Tuesday, April 12, 2011 to answer any questions and issues. We also are creating a new wiki that will include a page for individuals to post questions about the evaluation plans as well as provide a place for IMLS to post additional documents to help SLAAs; please stay tuned for more details. If still more information is needed, please contact your IMLS program officer or Matt Birnbaum, IMLS’s evaluation officer (mbirnbaum@imls.gov).