

# **Assessment of End-User Needs in IMLS-Funded Digitization Projects**

**Institute of Museum and Library Services**



October 2003

## **Executive Summary**

During the last decade, there has been rapid growth in digitization of museum and library collections across the United States. Digitization project teams and managers have become more sophisticated in their use of technology and in the ways in which they make collections accessible. The volume of content now available online has made digitization a well-established means of showcasing materials for teaching and learning.

According to the *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation's Museums and Libraries: 2002 Report*<sup>1</sup>, published by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), "digitization is an emerging focus in museums and libraries." More than 78 percent of all State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) reported digitization activities, followed by 34 percent of academic libraries, 32 percent of museums, and 25 percent of public libraries.

How do museums and libraries assess the needs of their users in relation to the digital products and services they are developing? What can institutions do to determine whether or not they have successfully met users' needs? To answer these questions, IMLS commissioned a study of the needs-assessment practices used in digitization projects funded through National Leadership Grants (NLG) and grants to State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) over a three-year period (Federal fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000). We learned that consensus on the definition of "needs assessment" among library and museum professionals must be strengthened, and that models and tools for conducting needs assessment are not widely adopted. Additional models and tools would also be helpful to museum and library professionals.

### **Findings**

- 1. The most frequently-used needs assessment methods do not directly involve the users.** Of the 140 projects in the universe of the study, 59, or 42 percent, of respondents provided specific information about needs-assessment initiatives that they conducted. Needs assessments relied heavily on the recommendations of staff and external professionals and advisory committees in the museum and library fields to plan and execute projects. User and visitor recommendations and counts were most often used to evaluate final project results. More formal needs assessment methods, like focus groups and customer and visitor surveys, were the least used. Few digitization efforts incorporated regular, systematic needs assessment throughout the design, build-out, and lives of the projects.

The message of this study is that managers of digitization projects could meet users' needs more effectively if they practiced better needs-assessment strategies.

- 2. Project managers defined "needs assessment" in different ways.** Some projects studied how users interacted with a Web site, a process similar to doing usability studies. Others

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.imls.gov/reports/techreports/intro02.htm>

identified and described users of and visitors to particular Web sites. Some interpreted user-needs assessment as a tool to promote a project. Many of the written documents that respondents submitted were forms and surveys for conducting evaluations, rather than for needs assessment.

For the purpose of this study, “needs assessment” is defined as “a structured process of collecting and analyzing users’ assumptions and the necessary or desired services to satisfy specific audiences. Needs assessment justifies the development and provision of services and allows for effective distribution of resources to support the services.”

**3. Respondents suggested some useful lessons.** Needs assessment plays an important role: It is used to support projects, to elicit support, and to ensure that Internet projects are responsive to user needs.

- Needs assessment should be conducted to inform project design. This is important when developing grant proposals.
- Project managers’ understanding of users’ needs changes during the life of the project. It is important to revisit the needs of users throughout project development.
- It can be difficult to assess users’ needs, particularly among unknown Web users worldwide, but there are strategies to sample needs.
- Effective needs assessments take time, effort, and expertise.

**4. Although respondents provided no best-practice models, many reported promising practices, including the following advice:**

- Go beyond internal and external experts to get information from users. Focus groups of current and potential users can provide useful insight and feedback about digital products. Reach out to other state and regional groups that represent current or potential users.
- A needs assessment engages users in the target audience not only in developing and testing a project’s digital products, but also in becoming faithful users of the digital solutions. For example, seeking responses from teachers as a project is developed and implemented also encourages them to use digitized images of local history in their lesson plans.
- Online surveys can be effective tools for gathering information from users.
- A variety of techniques, such as surveys, focus groups, library reference desk logs, records of questions posed by museum visitors, and feedback from advisory and interested community groups, can provide useful information for planning a digitization initiative.

**5. Project managers leading digitization efforts need tools to help them conduct end-user assessments and to utilize their results.** The survey responses and the assessment documents that many grantees submitted showed that a large number of the grantees do not know what needs assessment is. Generally speaking, grantees do not know how to do needs assessment and how to use the results. Therefore, libraries and museums would benefit from basic descriptions of and instruction in several methods of performing appropriate needs assessments.

## **How are thorough user-needs assessments beneficial?**

- In most digitization projects, professional staff selects appropriate materials and physical objects to be scanned or photographed for storing in digital collections. A user-needs assessment can inform those choosing the materials about the kinds of items to include, and, if necessary, how to prioritize them.
- During the development phase of a digitization project, gathering or confirming user-needs assessment information can help a library or museum to provide additional products or services to enhance the final digital product, such as adding interpretive information or curriculum guides.
- When digitized images are made available, information from user-needs assessments help museums and libraries decide how to publicize and, if appropriate, promote collections among audiences.
- A user-needs assessment can help prepare the institution for new and perhaps unexpected groups who will discover and start to use the digital collection. Some sense of who these prospective users are can emerge in discussions with or surveys of potential users beyond the immediate audience that the institution serves. To address the needs of outlying groups of users, project managers can make “mid-course” corrections. One action managers may take is adjusting the choice of items to be digitized, so that the digitized information is of interest to previously unidentified audiences.

The study demonstrated the need for greater knowledge and skills for conducting effective needs assessments and for applying the needs-assessment findings in designing and building digitization projects. Responses from some grantees indicate that among libraries and museums, there is a growing understanding of why needs assessment is important. IMLS will continue to urge its grantees to perform effective needs assessments and to use the information received to shape digitization products and services so they meet the needs of their target audiences. At minimum, all projects should demonstrate their impact, and doing that requires needs assessment.

## **Conducting and Utilizing User-Needs Assessments Is Worth the Effort**

Although a number of projects participating in the study pointed out how difficult it can be to gather information about current and potential users and their needs, successful projects with responsive audiences show that the results are worth it. One case is the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which initiated *Documenting the American South*, a growing library of digitized materials relating to Southern history, literature and culture. As the university has progressed in the project, it has developed an understanding and commitment to its Web users, who are worldwide. *Keep Up the Good Work(s): Readers Comment on Documenting the American South*<sup>2</sup> shows what readers from the general public, academic institutions and those involved in K-12 institutions thought about the books and other works that the university made available on the Web.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://docsouth.unc.edu/readers.pdf>

E-mail messages clearly document the importance and value of the digitized collection among intended and new users. As Library Director Joe Hewitt observed in the preface:

Often deeply personal and touching, the messages describe how valuable *DAS* (*Documenting the American South*) has been to our readers. Scores of individuals have discovered their family histories; many others have begun to relate to the nation's past in ways that inform and reorient their perspectives on important issues in the present. One reader, expressing a common sentiment, reported that *DAS* had led him to ““a fluent empathy for the everyday lives of the past.””

## **Recommendations**

**1. IMLS encourages museums and libraries to learn more about needs assessment and to apply its methods when planning, developing and managing IMLS grant-funded projects.**

IMLS offers an online tutorial on project planning that includes a section about conducting needs assessments. **NLG Project Planning: A Tutorial** is available, free of charge, at this Web address: [http://e-services.imls.gov/project\\_planning](http://e-services.imls.gov/project_planning). Other useful resources are included in the **Literature Cited and Selected Resources** section of this report.

**2. Libraries and museums should conduct and use needs assessment for their digitization projects in the following ways:**

- Institutions should identify new and potential audiences early in the digitization process and involve these audiences in creating Web or software applications through which audiences will search and use the digitized information.
- Project leaders and members of digitization teams should be flexible and adhere to the users' needs in designing interfaces.
- Digitization teams should consult users frequently to find out whether or not projects are meeting their needs and to understand the types of changes that satisfy users' needs.
- Institutions should promote the advantages of collaborative user-needs surveys conducted at the state, local, or regional levels.
- Libraries and museums should identify and address the proposed goals of each digitization project, whether they are encouraging learning, improving access, preserving originals, or supporting some other purpose.

**3. The results of the IMLS National Leadership Grant initiative, *A National Study of Users and Potential Users of Online Information*,<sup>3</sup> should be widely disseminated within the museum and library communities.**

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<sup>3</sup> “One project to conduct a large national survey of the information needs and expectations of users of *online* information, and of the impacts of having such information. IMLS made a single award for this priority in September 2003. The project will be carried out in collaboration with IMLS.” *2003 National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museums: Grant Application and Information*, p. 2.5.

<http://www.imls.gov/grants/library/pdf/nlg03app.pdf>

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This study was conducted for the Institute of Museum and Library Services by Performance Results, Inc., with assistance from Reda International.

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## **Introduction**

This report begins by relating the background of IMLS reasons for conducting an assessment of end-user needs in IMLS-funded digitization projects. Next, we describe the methods used to conduct the study. The “Findings” section provides analyses of the responses to telephone and mail surveys. In “Promising Practices,” perhaps the most interesting section, we provide examples of user-assessment practices that may be useful in the context of other projects. We conclude with a brief summary and recommendations.

## **Background**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is dedicated to promoting library and museum services among all current and potential users, to promoting access to learning and information resources, and to enriching the educational, social, and cultural life. The application of computer and telecommunications technologies has changed the ways in which museums and libraries interact with their communities and users. These technologies have enabled greater access for users to cultural, historic, scientific, and artistic collections and resources and have advanced educational opportunities for students across the globe. Since 1998, IMLS has funded a growing number of projects with substantial digitization components. Most of these projects digitally preserve culturally important and historic images, artifacts, and text materials by converting them to electronic representations that are accessible by computer via the Internet and other devices. Making collections available online allows an unlimited number of users to access, view, and learn from the images, artifacts and text materials.

According to the IMLS publication, *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation’s Museums and Libraries Report 2002*<sup>4</sup>, libraries and museums are increasing their digitization activities. More than 78 percent of all State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) reported digitization activities, followed by academic libraries at 34 percent, museums at 32 percent, and public libraries at 25 percent. Historic documents, archives, and photographs were the most commonly digitized materials, followed by images of items or artifacts from collections, newspapers, manuscripts, and college-course materials. The most common goals were to increase access to information and to preserve primary source materials.

The *Status of Technology and Digitization* report provided insight into the scope of technology and digitization activities among libraries and museums.. The report recommended that IMLS undertake a study that “explores how organizations identify current and potential audiences and their need for digital resources.”<sup>5</sup>

The findings of the recommended study will be important not only for understanding the needs, goals, and uses of digitization activities, but also to meet funding and accountability

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.imls.gov/reports/techreports/intro02.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.imls.gov/reports/techreports/action02.htm>

requirements. As an agency of the US Government, IMLS must meet the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. This Act works to improve government operations by focusing on actual results achieved by federal agencies and linking results to the budget process. For many years, IMLS has encouraged grantees to measure project results. However, in order to measure results—to be able to state that users found what they wanted when using a specific digitization application—grantees first need a solid means of understanding the needs of specific user groups.

IMLS called on Performance Results, Incorporated of Laytonsville, Maryland, to conduct a study on how libraries and museums assessed needs in digitization projects funded by IMLS through National Leadership Grants (NLGs) and grants to SLAAs.<sup>6</sup> This report describes the process, findings and recommendations of the study.

The NLG program funds model projects to improve library and museum services and to enhance cooperation among libraries and museums. Grant application guidelines identify successful projects as those that “reflect an understanding of current issues and needs related to library or museum services or the interaction between the two. They will demonstrate a clear sense of how their projects will contribute to the library and museum fields and will affect the public.”<sup>7</sup> A focus on clearly established user needs also applies to State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs). The IMLS planning model for SLAAs highlights needs assessment as a critical part of the statewide planning process. IMLS strongly encourages SLAAs to use updated, organization-wide needs assessments as the foundation for meeting the Five-Year Plan requirement.

Findings from the present study will be used for the following purposes:

- To find out how museum and library grantees identify target audiences for their projects and how institutions define the needs of the intended target audiences,
- To understand what grantees do with needs assessment information as they complete IMLS-supported projects,
- To investigate the ways in which grantees address the needs of the target audiences as grant projects are implemented,
- To report on the manner in which grantees employ needs assessment information in the evaluation and promotion components of their projects,
- To identify models of needs assessment among the projects,
- To make informed recommendations of the best practices for IMLS grant recipients to use in assessing end-user needs,
- To describe the training and staff development issues that libraries and museums must address to successfully assess the needs of end users,
- To form strategies and best practices for Outcome Based Evaluation (OBE), and
- To develop technical assistance materials to help project developers in the museum and library communities conduct effective needs assessments.

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<sup>6</sup> IMLS makes grants State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) under the State Grant Program. The SLAAs administer the grants within their states. The SLAAs can make sub-grants to libraries and other designated organizations and they can manage their own projects that use these funds.

<sup>7</sup> 2003 National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museums: Grant Application and Information, 1.2.

## Method

### Identifying Digitization Projects

IMLS funds a variety of projects through its NLG program and its grants to SLAAs program, through which the states administer and disseminate funds authorized by the Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) to local, regional, and state organizations. The target audience for the present study included NLG and grants to SLAA projects completed during 1998, 1999, and 2000, and including substantial digitization components. National Leadership Grant projects were funded under the following programs: Museums Online; Museums in the Community; Museum–Library Collaboration; Library Research and Demonstration; Library Preservation or Digitization; and Library Education and Training. Recipients of SLAA grants included projects managed by the SLAAs or their sub-grantees within the states.

For the purposes of this study, “digitization” is “the process of converting, creating, and maintaining books, artworks, historic documents, photos, journals, and other items, into electronic representations so that users can view museum and library collections on computer monitors and other devices.”<sup>8</sup>

A database of projects funded through NLGs and grants to SLAAs was searched to identify projects with a digitization focus. After reviewing grant summaries and abstracts, 140 projects were identified as the universe for the study. Because of the relatively small size of the universe, all the projects were asked to complete a telephone survey. Table 1 shows the group of projects at each stage of the data collection.

**Table 1**

Number of Projects Included in the Survey,  
By Stage of Data Collection and Type of Institution

	Museums	Libraries	Total	Response Rate
<b>Digitization Projects That May Have Conducted Needs Assessments</b>				
Telephone-survey universe	19	121	140	
Telephone-survey response	16	97	113	80.7%
<b>Digitization Projects Conducting Needs Assessments</b>				
Mail-survey universe	16	97	113	
Mail-survey response	11	63	74	65.5%

<sup>8</sup> This is the definition of “digitization” used in *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation’s Museums and Libraries: 2002 Report*.

## **Identifying Digitization Projects That Conducted Needs Assessments**

The initial plan for the present study was to extract information about needs assessments from the grant applications and to survey grantees from which we needed additional information. After a preliminary review of the NLG applications and summaries of grants to SLAA projects, however, it was clear that these documents did not contain usable descriptions of the grantees' needs assessments. Therefore, we designed a new data collection strategy that incorporated two surveys, as described in the next section.

### **Survey Instruments**

Performance Results used two survey instruments in this study:

1. A telephone survey identified digitization projects for which needs assessments had been conducted. In this survey, project managers were asked to identify and briefly describe the needs assessment methods they used in preparing their grant applications and in completing the funded project.
2. A follow-up mail survey gathered detailed needs assessment information from those projects identified in the telephone survey. Performance Results sent the mail survey to the 113 grantees that reported collecting needs assessment data. The mail survey included both open- and closed-ended questions to describe how project teams identified users and their needs before and during the projects. It also asked about goals, purposes, target audiences, and how the needs-assessment information was used.

Both surveys were field-tested with nine projects to estimate the time burden of the surveys and to assess the instruments' effectiveness and clarity.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conducting the Surveys**

The telephone survey (See Appendix B) was conducted March–May 2002. The first step was sending a pre-survey letter (See Appendix A) to 140 grantees announcing the survey and potential uses of the data. Telephone interviewers contacted all the grantees and sought to speak to people most familiar with a project's needs assessment process. With a number of projects, there were substantial delays in receiving responses to the telephone interview. Often the person(s) most familiar with a needs assessment were difficult to reach. Most of the grantees (113, or 81percent) indicated that they had conducted some kind of needs assessment, which made them eligible for the comprehensive mail survey.

The mail survey was conducted April–July of 2002. A cover letter (Appendix C) and a comprehensive survey (Appendix D) were sent to 113 projects. Respondents were also given the option of completing the survey online. The survey asked grantees to describe the details of their needs assessments, including their audiences, methods, and uses of the information gathered.

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<sup>9</sup> Copies of the two survey instruments are included in Appendices B and D.

Performance Results sent reminder postcards to projects that did not respond within two weeks after the survey was mailed. If a completed survey was not returned within the two weeks after the institutions received the postcards, we sent a second cover letter and questionnaire to the grantees. A total of 74 completed surveys were returned. About 25 percent of those responding chose to complete the survey online. The overall response rate was 65.5 percent. Differences in response rates for museums and libraries were not significant.

Of the 74 comprehensive surveys that were returned, 59 grantees provided specific information about their needs assessments. This group became the focus of the Performance Results data analysis. Fifteen of the 74 respondents were taken out of the study group because their survey responses did not include specific information about needs assessments they had completed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> All the institutions that received mail surveys had indicated during the telephone survey that they had conducted some kinds of needs assessment. We do not know the reasons why they did not provide specific information in the comprehensive survey.

## **Findings**

### **Grant Projects Included in the Study**

Comprehensive surveys were sent to grantees that indicated during the telephone survey that they conducted some type of needs assessment either prior to or during their IMLS-funded project. Fifty-nine completed surveys made up the study group whose responses were analyzed.

### **Grant Type**

Table 2 shows the distribution of completed surveys among the different IMLS grant programs.

**Table 2**

Frequency and Percentage of Projects, by Type of Grant

Type of Grant	Frequency	Percent
SLAA Program Grants	40	67.8
NLG – Library	12	20.3
NLG – Library–Museum Collaboration	6	10.2
NLG – Museum	1	1.7
Total	59	100.0

### **Type of Organization**

Table 3 shows the distribution of types of libraries and museums participating in the grant programs.

**Table 3**

Frequency and Percentage of Different Types of Organizations

Type of Organization	Frequency	Percent
Academic library	26	44.1
Public library	14	23.7
SLAA	8	13.6
Museum	5	8.5
Multi-type library	3	5.05
Special library	3	5.05
Total	59	100.0

## **SLAA Grantees**

Table 4 shows the distribution of projects by type of organization receiving grants through SLAAs.

**Table 4**

Frequency and Percentage of Different Types of Organizations  
Receiving Grants through SLAAs

Type of organization	Frequency	Percent
Academic library	13	32.5
Public library	13	32.5
SLAA	7	17.5
Multi-type	3	7.5
Special library	2	5.0
Museum	2	5.0
Total	40	100

## **Project Time Frame**

All of the digitization projects that Performance Results contacted for inclusion in the study received grants in Federal fiscal years 1998, 1999, or 2000. Grants to SLAAs are usually awarded for one-year periods, and NLGs are generally given for a two-year period. At the time we conducted this survey, some of the grant projects had not been completed.

## **Materials Digitized**

The projects in the study digitized many types of materials. The most commonly reported were historic documents (16), followed by single-subject information (8), displays of art and exhibitions (4), and unique local records (4). Other types of content mentioned by individual respondents included biographical history, photographs, newspapers, maps, and a virtual walking tour.

## **Purposes of Digitization**

About half (32, or 54 percent) of projects involved digitization of materials. However, some respondents mentioned other kinds of digitization initiatives, including the following: creating a digital resource-sharing system (4), developing strategy and best practices for a digitization project (4), providing online access to primary-source information (3), creating a virtual library or repository (3), and preserving materials (2).

Two respondents provided additional insights into the importance of digitization for the purpose of preserving materials:

“I think there is a tension, especially in the archival community, between measuring value in terms of meeting current user needs and preserving access to content over the long term, when user needs and requirements will most assuredly change. I worry about the trend toward forcing cultural repositories to focus too much on immediate results, but I understand the pressure facing IMLS to prove the ‘value’ of the work they support, when that ‘value’ is increasingly measured by their funders on a business rather than a cultural scale.”

“It is important to recognize that museums and archives address needs that don’t exist yet. We can’t be so present-oriented that we fail to devote resources and creativity to preservation.”

In some cases, digitization projects did not provide products or services to users. This was particularly the case for those grantees who were seeking to enhance their digitization capability or to develop digitization policies. One respondent observed: “The LSTA funds are supporting creation of metadata and travel to support meetings of project participants and training. So I don’t believe end-user needs are addressed here.” The purpose of another project was to identify the necessary hardware and software requirements for digitization. Although these processes are necessary to achieving the goal of digitization, users are not aware of these functions and do not experience a need for them.

### **Target Audience**

In defining the target audiences of their digitization projects, approximately half (32, or 54 percent) of respondents named scholars (teachers, students, researchers). Other common descriptions of target audiences included: general public or diverse group (17), users within a specific geographic area (16), and specific groups of interested persons (historians, genealogists, medical staff, lawyers, and other professional categories) (15).

### **Use of Various Needs-Assessment Methods Before and During the Project**

Respondents were asked about needs assessments that were conducted before the institutions drafted their grant applications and those conducted as staff implemented projects to determine whether audience needs had changed. For those who conducted user assessments at either stage, survey questions included a list of eight user-assessment methods (see list-Table 6). Respondents were asked to check all that applied. They also had the option of checking “other” and specifying the type of method that was used, or to check “none.” To be included in the final sample of projects, respondents had to provide specific information about needs assessments they conducted either before or during their projects.

Table 5 shows combinations of methods that were typically reported. Among the 57 respondents who reported conducting some needs assessment prior to writing their grant application, the average number of methods used was 3.11. Among the 36 respondents who reported some needs assessment during their projects, the average number of methods used was 2.25. Because grantees used mixtures of user-assessment methods, percentages in the following tables total more than 100.

**Table 5**

Number of Respondents Who Conducted Some Needs Assessment

	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Average Number of Methods</b>
Number conducting needs assessments before beginning projects	<b>57</b>	<b>3.11</b>
Number conducting needs assessment <i>during</i> projects	<b>36</b>	<b>2.25</b>
Number conducting needs assessments before <u>and</u> during projects	<b>29</b>	<b>Before: 3.27</b> <b>During: 2.75</b>

**Needs Assessments Conducted Before Grant Applications**

Table 6 shows the variety of methods used. The adjusted percentages are based on the 57 projects that reported performing pre-application needs assessments. It is noteworthy that systematic methods of data collection (focus groups, customer or visitor surveys, analyses of demographic data or trends) were the least used methods.

**Table 6**

Common Methods of Identifying Target Populations and Their Needs  
Conducted Before Grant Application (N=57)

<b>Method Used to Identify Target Populations and Their Needs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of All Eligible Projects</b>
Seek opinions from internal staff	49	86%
Seek opinions from external professionals	43	75%
Review records of use	22	39%
Request feedback from advisory committee	21	37%
Ask users/visitors for recommendations	21	37%
Form and question focus groups	9	16%
Survey customers and/or visitors	7	12%
Analyze demographic data	6	11%

## **Needs Assessments Conducted During the Project**

Thirty-six respondents (61 percent) reported conducting at least one type of needs assessment during the course of their projects. Table 7 shows the methods used; the percentages speak only of the 36 respondents who conducted needs assessments during their projects.

As with the assessments conducted prior to applying for grants, institutions more often used indirect methods than methods that directly involved end users.

However, with grantees conducting needs assessments during (rather than before) work on a project, there was a slight increase in the use of customer or visitor surveys. As some respondents indicated, it can be difficult to identify and survey potential users before a project has begun. Once a digitized collection is available online, it is possible to seek feedback from users through online surveys.

**Table 7**

Frequency and Percentage of Methods Employed to Identify Target Populations and Their Needs, Conducted During Projects

N=36 (Projects that reported at least one type of needs assessment)

<b>Method Used to Identify Target Populations and Their Needs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Seek opinions from external professionals	15	42%
Seek opinions from internal staff	13	36%
Request feedback from advisory committee	13	36%
Ask users/visitors for recommendations	11	31%
Survey customers or visitors	10	28%
Form and question focus groups	8	22%
Review records of use	7	19%
Analyze demographic data	5	14%

## **Conducting Assessments to Determine Whether or not End Users' Needs Were Met**

Respondents were asked whether they assessed the project to determine whether or not they reached the target audiences and met their needs. Of the 56 respondents who answered this question, 55 percent answered “yes” and 45 percent answered “no.” When Performance Results asked grantees to identify the methods they used to determine whether or not the project met the needs of the end users, most of the 31 respondents who reported evaluating their success in meeting users’ needs indicated a combination of methods. Table 8 shows the methods grantees used. Performance Results found no systematic differences between NLGs and grants made through SLAAs.

**Table 8**

Number and Percentage of Projects Using Different Forms of Data Collection  
To Determine Whether or not User Needs Were Met  
(N =31)

<b>Method Used</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage*</b>
Comments from users/visitors	27	87%
Counting users and visitors counts	23	74%
Request feedback from advisory committee	10	32%
Satisfaction surveys	8	26%
Form and question focus groups	6	19%

### Determining Success in Meeting End–Users’ Needs

Forty projects responded to the question of whether or not they had succeeded in meeting end-users’ needs. Thirty-one (78 percent) answered “yes,” and nine (22 percent) marked “unsure.” Some projects stated that the question was premature, because they had not completed their projects. Three respondents said their projects were partially successful, and another grantee noted that its project was focused on multi-type library collaboration *on behalf of* users, rather than directly on end-user needs. Among the 31 “yes” responses, 23 (77 percent) were projects funded through grants to SLAAs; eight “yes” responses were NLG projects.

Institutions that indicated they had met end-users’ needs were asked how they determined their results. The most common response was “Web site statistics or user counts” (16), followed by “positive comments from patrons” (7), “increase in general use” (5), and “survey feedback” (4).

### The Use of Ongoing Input and Feedback from End Users

In asking how the project used ongoing suggestions and comments from end users, the survey offered five responses and “other.” Respondents could check more than one answer. Below is the breakdown by response:

- Improve quality of presentation (22)
- Change content/selection of what is offered (19)
- Make process more user-friendly (14)
- Use as part of marketing/outreach (11)
- Change target audience (3), and
- Other: Some projects still had to make changes or were in the development stages. Others used the feedback to help obtain additional resources.

Comments by several respondents suggest that the needs assessment data was used to improve Web site usability, rather than to respond directly to user needs:

- “We did not focus on the needs of our users per se. We relied upon what we know about users of digital collections and information online, then we focused upon usability testing.”

- “We did not do a formal assessment, but relied on the knowledge of those most familiar with the collection.”
- “The demand for the images was evident; their importance, uniqueness and fragility were well-known.”
- “In regards to ‘usability,’ assessment tools that rely on user self-reports (survey, focus groups, advisory committees, and recommendations from users or visitors) will not always give us the information we need to create a well-designed site. We rely heavily on published literature as in the work of Jakob Neilson and Don’t Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability, by Steve Krug.”

### **Use of Consultants and Other Resources for Help with Needs Assessments**

Four of the digitization projects included in the study used outside consultants to design or conduct a needs assessment. When asked why they used an outside consultant, all four indicated that the expertise was not available internally; three of the four also cited lack of time as a reason. When asked whether any other resources were used to help with needs assessments, 20 respondents indicated that they had used one of the following:

- The Internet (17)
- Books and Publications (14)
- Training Workshops and Classes (10), or
- “Other”: Staff input, reliance on experience and knowledge of subject matter, and common sense.

Thirty-four reported that they did not use outside resources.

### **Making Instruments or Reports Available**

Performance Results asked whether or not survey respondents had copies of the needs-assessment instruments they used, reports of their needs assessments, or evaluations of their projects, which they would be willing to share with IMLS. Twenty-two grantees answered affirmatively, and most (20) of those enclosed copies of the instruments with their completed surveys or sent them under separate cover. Some of the instruments submitted were surveys of participating institutions rather than of end users. Others were evaluation surveys. The most common documents provided were evaluation reports (12), survey forms (8), and data (5). Other documents included letters, printouts, and meeting minutes.

### **Lessons Learned by Respondents**

A common lesson learned was that **needs assessments play an important role in a digitization project**. The specific role of needs assessments varied among respondents. Several grantees saw the advantages of needs assessments as methods for promoting their projects and eliciting support. Others saw needs assessments as tools to ensure that projects were responsive to user needs. Needs assessment, reported these grantees, helped them incorporate feedback into their projects and avoid errors when relying on intuition or perceived needs.

A key lesson learned is that **each institution's understanding of users' needs changes over time**. Some potential audiences and users may not emerge until after the digitized product is available. One grantee noted:

“The needs outlined in the original grant proposal will probably change and mutate as the project becomes a reality. We made the conscious decision to add in many more enhancements than originally specified, because we saw the value they would provide for users. We took the pulse of the project quite a few times.”

Many respondents stated that **needs assessments should be conducted before submitting grant applications and that assessing user needs should continue throughout the project.**

“Needs assessment should continue over the course of the project, and adjustments in goals, sometimes even major adjustments, should be anticipated.”

“Each project is different and requires being looked at in new ways not only because of differing materials, but also because of the ever-changing technology scene. Additional target audiences have a great impact on selection and development and must be considered throughout the process.”

Distribution of digital content via the Internet introduced additional challenges for respondents in identifying and describing end-users. One respondent described the task of identifying end-users this way: “Digital imagery projects have a very, very wide range of users and potential users.” Several respondents expressed frustration in addressing this difficult task:

“Sometimes it can be very difficult to assess needs. There really was no way to find out the needs of non-local users who might be interested in [our collection].”

“I don’t think anyone really has a handle on who their Web users are.”

“It is difficult. There is no consensus.”

“It is difficult to contact the unknown user.”

“The most important lesson was that material on the Internet is available to everyone, making it extremely difficult to identify potential users in advance.”

Others admitted having limited success: “Users are not a monolithic group. I’m sure that we are meeting the needs of some users who have certain questions better than others....”

Another lesson learned was that **needs assessments require substantial time, effort, and expertise to do well**. One respondent noted: “The time and energy required to sustain needs assessment throughout a two-year grant period is very high. In fact, those efforts can absorb most of a full-time employee’s time.” Several respondents found IMLS workshops<sup>11</sup> and materials helpful in conducting their needs assessments.

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<sup>11</sup> “IMLS workshops” probably refers to the Outcome-Based Evaluation (OBE) workshops that NLG grant recipients are asked to attend after the grant awards are made. IMLS also provides OBE workshops for SLAAs.

## Promising Practices

The findings indicate widely differing purposes, goals, audiences, and approaches to conducting needs assessments among the respondents. A study of best practices should identify both situations and practices that are widely relevant, feasible, and credible for the audience. Unfortunately in this study, projects had too few common features, and projects had limited corroborated data to show that any one of them was best. However, some promising practices were identified.

### **1. Include New and Potential Users in the Needs Assessments.**

The most promising practices that emerged from this study focused on efforts to include new and potential users and to gain their ideas and responses. Among the projects that conducted needs assessments, most used input from internal experts (87 percent) and external experts (76 percent). Several projects went further and sought feedback from new and potential users. Several projects noted the following reasons for reaching beyond internal and external experts:

“Talking to major groups in the state is helpful in getting direction and buy-in for setting priorities.”

“Focus groups work very well in small communities. They are a good way to educate folks about a project and solicit feedback.”

Here are examples of other promising practices:

- When a newly digitized collection is being added to an existing Web site, it is possible to include an on-line survey regarding the proposed addition and to solicit input via e-mail. This method of conducting a customer or visitor survey was reported by two projects engaged in a joint effort.
- A state historical society surveyed teachers to determine the relative importance of a list of topics and to obtain suggestions for topics not yet listed. Teachers were also asked about the current use of artifacts and Internet sites in lesson plans, about training received, and about how the project could facilitate their use of primary resources. There were 237 completed surveys, primarily from high-school and middle-school teachers. In addition to providing valuable insights for planning, the survey also identified schools willing to have teachers and students test lesson plans developed along with the project.
- One project, a library-museum collaboration with a target audience of middle-school and high-school students and teachers, conducted teacher focus groups at two stages of the project. Before the project began, the initial focus group participants suggested several categories of subject matter to be included. Those categories on the survey “guided the selection of material to be included and provided the overall structure for much of the Web site.” Midway through the project, a second focus group offered

preliminary feedback and identified additional needs. Teachers expressed a need for more interpretive material in the site. As a result of the second focus group, photo-essays were added, and the site design was modified to make it more user-friendly.

- Another collaborative project used an outside consultant to conduct focus groups to obtain user perceptions of two different approaches to the presentation of digital information--in particular, digital images of artifacts, photographs, and other documents. The focus groups explored the relative merits of the catalogue or database approach, which is associated with libraries, and the exhibit approach, which is common to museums. With help from local organizations, individuals were recruited from the following three categories of users: hobbyists, students, and general users. Each focus group began with the presentation of a relevant example of a library and a museum Web site. Then, users answered a series of questions. For example, the students, who were from grades 7-12, were given a scenario that involved researching a paper on a particular historical event.
- The focus groups provided the project with valuable guidance on the relevance of different approaches to finding information, the reasons for using digital collections, and the anticipated impact on visitors to the participating libraries and museums.

## 2. **Creatively Use Multiple Methods of Assessing Needs.**

Many projects used multiple methods of data collection to conduct needs assessments. Each project used a different strategy to describe the nature and extent of its target audiences. A few projects described their strategies this way:

“Ask early and often. Do many tests. Triangulate responses.”  
“More than one feedback method is important.”  
“Use a variety of assessment methods, categorize target audiences to solicit input regarding specific resources and for input across resources.”

Some of the more promising practices in drawing upon multiple methods to assess user needs included the following scenarios:

- One public library began its digitization project planning by consulting an expert who had developed a similar project, but the library soon expanded its planning to incorporate wider circles of participation. An advisory committee of academic and public librarians formed during the planning stage and continued to meet on a regular basis to discuss the process for selecting materials to be digitized, and how those selections would serve end users. Once the Web site was established, users were provided with e-mail addresses and phone numbers and were encouraged to offer comments and suggestions. A comprehensive Web site analysis was used to track and categorize visits and requests by viewer type and by the type of information requested. This analysis provided a valuable overview of the audience and its viewing patterns. Based on user feedback and advisory-committee discussions, the grantee made changes to the Web site’s content and format.

- Another public library began with a customer survey based on earlier digitization efforts, established an advisory committee of partner organizations, and reviewed a log of reference questions. Discussions were held with reference desk staff, historians working in the area, and frequent users. Once the collection was digitized and available through the Web site, the library sought user feedback through an online survey. The library also collected feedback from a walk-in user survey, a user analysis of Web site data, public meetings, and feedback from the advisory committee. The respondent noted that the project has a very wide range of users with different viewpoints. User feedback enabled the library to improve the quality of its online presentation and to make the digitization process more user-friendly.
- A school of Library Science and Information Services surveyed members of relevant agencies, sought the opinions of key informants and staff, and conducted a focus group with sixth-grade teachers. As the digitization project got underway, the grantees conducted usability tests with sixth and seventh graders, whose feedback was helpful in making improvements. The advisory committee met four times during the project. Based on user feedback, project team members made changes to the Web site's content and to the Web site development process.
- An academic library with a fairly broad audience for its digitization project used a variety of methods to assess user needs. An advisory committee was selected to represent professors, archivists, and general users. Project team members conducted telephone interviews to obtain users' opinions on the materials to be included in the project. The initial list was derived from a review of records to determine what materials the in-house patrons used most often during the previous four years. Workshops for K-12 teachers assessed the utility of the project's lesson plans and secured reaction to the digitized materials. A written survey during the workshop provided a format for teachers to contribute their feedback and suggestions.
- Marketing and outreach led to a different definition of a project's target audience, and ultimately, in the content for another public library's digitization project. That project began by gathering input from interested community members. The project team also selected outside informants based on their knowledge and experience with digitization. Staff checked Census data to determine how the local population was changing. During the course of the project, the grantee established an advisory committee and sought input from patrons, staff, and outside experts. Community groups contacted the library to encourage broader access, which resulted in more outreach. In turn, broader communication made it possible to receive suggestions for more varied content.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Findings

#### **1. The most frequently-used needs assessment methods do not directly involve the users.**

Of the 140 projects in the universe of the study, 59, or 42 percent, of respondents provided specific information about needs-assessment initiatives that they conducted. Needs assessments relied heavily on the recommendations of staff and external professionals and advisory committees in the museum and library fields to plan and execute projects. User and visitor recommendations and counts were most often used to evaluate final project results. More formal needs assessment methods, like focus groups and customer and visitor surveys, were the least used. Few digitization efforts incorporated regular, systematic needs assessment throughout the design, build-out, and lives of the projects.

The message of this study is that managers of digitization projects could meet users' needs more effectively if they practiced better needs-assessment strategies.

#### **2. Project managers defined “needs assessment” in different ways.** Some projects studied how users interacted with a Web site, a process similar to doing usability studies. Others identified and described users of and visitors to particular Web sites. Some interpreted user-needs assessment as a tool to promote a project. Many of the written documents that respondents submitted were forms and surveys for conducting evaluations, rather than for needs assessment.

For the purpose of this study, “needs assessment” is defined as “a structured process of collecting and analyzing users’ assumptions and the necessary or desired services to satisfy specific audiences. Needs assessment justifies the development and provision of services and allows for effective distribution of resources to support the services.”

#### **3. Respondents suggested some useful lessons.** Needs assessment plays an important role: It is used to support projects, to elicit support, and to ensure that Internet projects are responsive to user needs.

- Needs assessment should be conducted to inform project design. This is important when developing grant proposals.
- Project managers’ understanding of users’ needs changes during the life of the project. It is important to revisit the needs of users throughout project development.
- It can be difficult to assess users’ needs, particularly among unknown Web users worldwide, but there are strategies to sample needs.
- Effective needs assessments take time, effort, and expertise.

#### **4. Although respondents provided no best-practice models, many reported promising practices, including the following advice:**

- Go beyond internal and external experts to get information from users. Focus groups of current and potential users can provide useful insight and feedback about digital products. Reach out to other state and regional groups that represent current or potential users.

- A needs assessment engages users in the target audience not only in developing and testing a project's digital products, but also in becoming faithful users of the digital solutions. For example, seeking responses from teachers as a project is developed and implemented also encourages them to use digitized images of local history in their lesson plans.
- Online surveys can be effective tools for gathering information from users.
- A variety of techniques, such as surveys, focus groups, library reference desk logs, records of questions posed by museum visitors, and feedback from advisory and interested community groups, can provide useful information for planning a digitization initiative.

**5. Project managers leading digitization efforts need tools to help them conduct end-user assessments and to utilize their results.** The survey responses and the assessment documents that many grantees submitted showed that a large number of the grantees do not know what needs assessment is. Generally speaking, grantees do not know how to do needs assessment and how to use the results. Therefore, libraries and museums would benefit from basic descriptions of and instruction in several methods of performing appropriate needs assessments.

### **Recommendations**

**1. IMLS encourages museums and libraries to learn more about needs assessment and to apply its methods when planning, developing and managing IMLS grant-funded projects.**

IMLS offers an online tutorial on project planning that includes a section about conducting needs assessments. **NLG Project Planning: A Tutorial** is available, free of charge, at this Web address: [http://e-services.imls.gov/project\\_planning](http://e-services.imls.gov/project_planning). Other useful resources are included in the **Literature Cited and Selected Resources** section of this report.

**2. Libraries and museums should conduct and use needs assessment for their digitization projects in the following ways:**

- Institutions should identify new and potential audiences early in the digitization process and involve these audiences in creating Web or software applications through which audiences will search and use the digitized information.
- Project leaders and members of digitization teams should be flexible and adhere to the users' needs in designing interfaces.
- Digitization teams should consult users frequently to find out whether or not projects are meeting their needs and to understand the types of changes that satisfy users' needs.
- Institutions should promote the advantages of collaborative user-needs surveys conducted at the state, local, or regional levels.
- Libraries and museums should identify and address the proposed goals of each digitization project, whether they are encouraging learning, improving access, preserving originals, or supporting some other purpose.

3. The results of the IMLS National Leadership Grant initiative, *A National Study of Users and Potential Users of Online Information*,<sup>12</sup> should be widely disseminated within the museum and library communities.

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<sup>12</sup> “One project to conduct a large national survey of the information needs and expectations of users of *online* information, and of the impacts of having such information. IMLS made a single award for this priority in September 2003. The project will be carried out in collaboration with IMLS.” *2003 National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museums: Grant Application and Information*, p. 2.5.  
<http://www.imls.gov/grants/library/pdf/nlg03app.pdf>

## **Literature Cited and Selected Resources**

### **Literature cited**

*Keep Up the Good Work(s): Readers Comment on Documenting the American South.* Selected by Joe A. Hewitt and edited by Judith M. Panitch. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002. See also: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/readers.pdf>.

*National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museums: Grant Application and Information, 2003.* Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002. See also: <http://www.imls.gov/grants/library/pdf/nlg03app.pdf>.

*Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation's Museums and Libraries.* Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002. See also: <http://www.imls.gov/reports/techreports/intro02.htm>.

### **Selected Resources**

Biblarz, Dora, Stephen Bosch, and Chris Sugnet, eds. *Guide to Library User Needs Assessment for Integrated Information Resource Management and Collection Development.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001.

Watkins, Ryan, et al. "Needs Assessment: A Digest, Review, and Comparison of Needs Assessment Literature." *Performance Improvement* (September 1998): 40-53.

Westbrook, Lynn, *Identifying and Analyzing User Needs: A Complete Handbook and Ready-to-Use Assessment Workbook with Disk.* New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2002.

Zemke, Ron, and Thomas Kramlinger. *Figuring Things Out: A Trainer's Guide to Needs and Task Analysis.* Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1982.

**Appendix A**  
**Telephone Survey**  
**Cover Letter**

March 12, 2002

Dear Colleague:

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is conducting a study about digitization projects funded by this agency. Our immediate focus is on specific awards: National Leadership Grants (NLG) and Library Services & Technology Act (LSTA) grants from State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs). Our goal is to find out which institutions have assessed user needs in connection with digitization projects so that we can identify “best practices” to promote the success of NLG and LSTA applicants and awardees. The study is a part of IMLS’ ongoing effort to quantify the results of IMLS funding and to report them under the new Outcome-Based Evaluation requirement mandated by law.

Your institution is one of more than 150 libraries and museums that have received either NLG or LSTA funds for digitization projects in 1998, 1999, or 2000. In this preliminary part of the study, you will receive a telephone call from an interviewer who works for REDA International. The caller will ask to speak to the person most knowledgeable about your institution’s digitization project or projects. The purpose of the call is to determine whether or not your institution should be included in the full study.

The telephone interview should take 10 minutes or less. If the interviewer calls at an inconvenient time, please offer to reschedule. If you’d rather respond to this preliminary interview on paper, make arrangements for that with the interviewer.

We know that you are very busy, and we do appreciate your time and assistance in this study. You are providing a service to yourselves and to all IMLS awardees. As you complete the survey, please contact me if you should have any questions.

Cordially,

Barbara G. Smith  
Technology Officer, IMLS

202-606-5254  
[bsmith@imls.gov](mailto:bsmith@imls.gov)

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid number for this collection is 3137-0046. The preliminary survey will take up to 10 minutes for an individual to complete. Questions and comments about the burden time or about the survey should be directed to Barbara Smith.

**Appendix B**  
**Telephone Survey**

**TELEPHONE SURVEY  
FOR IMLS DIGITIZATION NEEDS-ASSESSMENT STUDY**

**INTERVIEWER:** Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling on behalf of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

1. Is this \_\_\_\_\_?

**CONTACT NAME**

Are you with \_\_\_\_\_?

**NAME OF INSTITUTION**

Yes\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_ IF "NO," PLEASE CHECK PHONE NUMBER AND TRY AGAIN.

We are conducting a survey of institutions that received funding for digitization projects either through the National Leadership Grants (NLG) program or through Library Services & Technology Act grants to State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs). The purpose of this study is to find out how museums and libraries have used needs-assessment information in planning or evaluating their digitization projects. I am calling today to ask a few questions to help us determine whether or not your organization should be included in the survey. All of your answers will be kept confidential and used for statistical purposes only.

2. I understand that you had a grant project titled \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. Is this correct?

**TITLE OF PROJECT YEAR**

Yes\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_ ASK FOR CORRECTION.

3. Are you the appropriate person to ask about the needs assessment for this project? Are you the person most familiar with how your institution gathered the planning information for your grant proposal?

Yes\_\_\_\_ IF "YES," GO TO QUESTION FOUR.

No\_\_\_\_ IF "NO," PLEASE ASK QUESTION 3A.

3a. What is the name of that person?

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DK \_\_\_\_\_ END THE SURVEY. ALERT IMLS.

**3b. Do you have a phone number for the proper person?**

DK \_\_\_\_\_ END THE SURVEY. ASK FOR THE INSTITUTION'S MAIN NUMBER.  
[NOTE: THE ORDER OF THE ITEMS LISTED UNDER NUMBERS 4 AND 5 WILL BE  
MADE RANDOM OR ROTATED.]

**4. Before submitting the grant application for this digitization project, did you use any of the following methods to identify the needs of your current or potential customers or visitors?**

**Did you...**

Conduct a customer or visitor survey?	Y N	Y N	_____
Interview or test focus groups?	Y N	Y N	_____
Consult an advisory committee?	Y N	Y N	_____
Obtain recommendations from users or visitors?	Y N	Y N	_____
Review checkout lists or records of use for materials and exhibits?	Y N	Y N	_____
Analyze demographic data and trends?	Y N	Y N	_____
Seek opinions from external professionals or from key informants outside of your organization?	Y N	Y N	_____
Seek opinions from members of your institution's staff?	Y N	Y N	_____
Conduct any other type of needs assessment?	Y N	Y N	_____
Please describe the needs-assessment project you conducted.			_____

**4a. ONLY ASK OF THOSE RESPONDING "NO" TO ALL OF THE OPTIONS IN NUMBER 4:**

**Would you like to share the reason why you did not conduct needs assessment?**

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**5. During the project period, did you conduct any needs assessment to determine whether or not user needs changed among your current or potential customers or visitors?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_

**(Go to Question 6)**

**5a. Which of the following methods did you employ? Did you consult any of the following?**

SHOULD THE QUESTIONNER USE THE TWO COLUMNS  
BELOW BY WRITING “YES” OR “NO” IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND A DESCRIPTION IN THE 2<sup>ND</sup>?  
PLEASE INDICATE ABOVE THE COLUMNS WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE LISTED IN  
EACH ONE. THANKS!

Customer or visitor surveys	_____	_____
Focus groups	_____	_____
Advisory committees	_____	_____
Recommendations from users or visitors	_____	_____
Lending or viewing records	_____	_____
Analysis of demographic data and trends	_____	_____
Opinions of external professionals or key informants	_____	_____
Opinions of internal staff	_____	_____
Anything else:	_____	_____

**INTERVIEWER, PLEASE NOTE:**

(IF the institution DID NOT conduct any types of needs assessment listed in questions 4 or 5, please end the survey with the statement below.)

**Interviewer: Those are all the questions I have. It does not appear that your organization is a candidate for inclusion in the written survey. Thank you for your help. (END SURVEY HERE.)**

**IF the person answered YES to any questions you asked in sections 4 or 5, please relate the following information to the respondent:**

**6. REDA International will send you a written survey to gain additional insight into your use of needs-assessment information in connection with your recent IMLS award.**

**6a. May I have your mailing address?**

**INTERVIEWER, PLEASE NOTE:**

**Repeat the respondent’s address back to him or her to confirm its accuracy.**

**INTERVIEWER, PLEASE STATE:**

**Thank you very much for your help today. You should receive the written survey within the next week. We’d greatly appreciate your completing it and returning it to us as quickly as you can.**

## **Appendix C**

### **Comprehensive Survey Cover Letter**

Insert date.

Dear Colleague:

REDA International recently called and asked some preliminary survey questions about digitization projects for which your institution received Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) or National Leadership Grant (NLG) funding. Based on your responses to the telephone survey, IMLS would like to request further details about needs assessment efforts you conducted at the same time you completed your IMLS-funded project.

The enclosed survey takes approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. Should you need more space to respond, please attach additional pages. IMLS also encourages you to enclose copies of any survey instruments or reports from your needs assessments.

If you would prefer to complete the survey online, it is posted on the following Internet site: <http://www.redainternational.com>. The password to enter the survey is "IMLS". Please be sure to enter the ID number from the printed survey in the appropriate field of the on-line survey.

Please complete and return the needs-assessment survey within the next two weeks, if at all possible. Your responses will help us identify strategies and best practices for needs assessment. We will include many of your ideas and responses in the Outcome Based Evaluation (OBE) Toolkit that we are developing for the museum and library communities. The information you provide will be aggregated with all the other responses. You and your institution will be identified only if you give permission.

Please keep in mind that your responses will not affect your current or future IMLS and/or LSTA grants. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions in this survey. In the meantime, if you should have any questions, or should you encounter any problems on the Web site, please contact Nekisha Lakins at 1-800-646-REDA or [nlakins@redainternational.com](mailto:nlakins@redainternational.com).

Thank you for your voluntary participation in this IMLS study.

Cordially,

Barbara G. Smith  
Technology Officer, IMLS  
202-606-5254  
[bsmith@imls.gov](mailto:bsmith@imls.gov)

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid number for this collection is 3137-0046. The enclosed survey will take up to 40 minutes for an individual to complete. Questions and comments about the burden time or about the survey should be directed to Barbara Smith.

**Appendix D**  
**Comprehensive Survey**

1. ID number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete the following:**

1a. Name of project: \_\_\_\_\_

1b. Grant type:

LSTA-State     LSTA-local     LSTA-regional  
 NLG-Library     NLG-Museum     NLG-Library-Museum Collaboration

1c. Name of your organization: \_\_\_\_\_

1d. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

1e. Person completing survey: \_\_\_\_\_

1f. Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

1g. E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

1h. Type of organization:

Public library  
 Academic library  
 State library  
 Library association  
 Museum  
 Museum association  
 Multi-type  
 Other: (Please specify.) \_\_\_\_\_

1i. Start date: \_\_\_\_\_

1j. End date: \_\_\_\_\_

1k. Grant amount: \_\_\_\_\_

1l. Total project cost for the project period, from the start date to the end date:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Briefly describe the overall purpose of the project.**

**3. Briefly describe the target audiences or intended end users of the digitized products.**

**4. If you conducted needs assessment before writing the grant application, what methods did you use? (Please check all that apply.)**

- Customer or visitor survey
- Focus groups
- Advisory committee
- Recommendations from users or visitors
- Review of loan records or visitors' logs for materials and/or exhibits
- Analysis of demographic data and/or trends
- Opinions of external professionals and/or key informants from outside of your institution
- Opinions of internal staff  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

None      (Please go to question 5.)

**4a. Please describe the user-assessment method or methods you employed. For example, describe the number and types of people surveyed, the databases you used, your process for selecting focus-group members, the frequency of your data collection, and the like. If you sought opinions from key informants, explain how you selected them. If necessary, please attach additional pages. Kindly enclose any work descriptions you already have.**

**5. If you conducted needs assessment during the project to determine whether needs changed, what method or methods did you use? Please check all that apply.**

- Customer or visitor survey
- Focus groups
- Advisory committee
- Recommendations from users or visitors

- Review of loan records or visitors' logs for materials and/or exhibits
- Analysis of demographic data and/or trends
- Opinions of external professionals and/or key informants from outside your institution
- Opinions of internal staff
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- None Please go to question 6.

**5a. Please describe the method or methods you employed. If necessary, please attach additional pages. Kindly enclose any work descriptions you already have.**

**6. Have you assessed your IMLS-funded project to determine whether or not you have reached the target audience and whether you are satisfying end users' expectations?**

Yes   
No  Please go to question 7.

**6a. In what ways have you determined whether or not you have met the needs of end users? Please check all that apply.**

- User and/or visitor counts
- Satisfaction surveys
- Comments from users and/or visitors
- Focus groups
- Advisory committee
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6b. Please describe the method or methods you used. Should you lack sufficient space, please attach additional pages. Please also send any work descriptions you already have.**

**7. What goals did your institution identify from conducting the needs assessment for this project?**

**7a. Has the project succeeded in meeting end users' needs?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_ Please go to question 8.

Unsure \_\_\_\_\_ Please go to question 8.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7b. How do you know that your project has met user needs? Please explain:**

**8. How has the project benefited from constant interaction with end users and open-mindedness toward their ideas and reactions? Please check all that apply.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Change content, or modify the selection of what the Web site or application offers

\_\_\_\_\_ Improved quality of presentation

- Eased the Web-development or digitization process       Changed target audience  
 Assisted with marketing or outreach  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8a. Please describe:**

**9. Did you use an outside consultant to design or conduct your needs assessment(s)?**

Yes   
No  **Please go to question 10.**

**9a. Why did you use an outside consultant? (Check all that apply)**

- Lack of time  
 Lack of expertise  
 Other: (Please specify.) \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Are there any other resources you consulted to inform your needs assessments?**

Yes   
No  **Please go to question 11.**

**10a. Kindly indicate the types of resources you used. Please check all that apply.**

- Training workshops/classes  
 Books/publications  
 Internet  
 Other: (Please specify.) \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Do you have any copies of survey instruments you sent to focus groups, key informants, or advisory committee members? Did you write reports concerning your needs assessment or evaluations of your digitization project? If so, please enclose them with your completed survey.**

Survey instruments: \_\_\_\_\_ Reports \_\_\_\_\_

Yes         
No       

Yes         
No       

**12. During the course of this project, what lessons did you learn about assessing the needs of your users and/or visitors?**

**13. Do you have any suggestions for IMLS and its other grantees about conducting needs assessment?**

Thank you very much for completing this survey and returning it in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to REDA International. Should you need assistance, please contact Nekisha Lakins at 1-800-646-REDA or [nlakins@redainternational.com](mailto:nlakins@redainternational.com)

*According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid number for this collection is 3137-0046. The comprehensive survey will take up to 40 minutes for an individual to complete. Questions and comments about the burden time or about the survey should be directed to Barbara Smith at [bsmith@imls.gov](mailto:bsmith@imls.gov) or 202-606-5254.*