Online Surveys of Library Patrons and Staff

Final Report

Findings and Executive Summary

December 2011
METHODOLOGY

EPIC • MRA administered two online surveys, one for library staff and one for library patrons. A total of 562 library staff, beginning August 29, 2011 and ending October 11, 2011, and 26 library patrons, beginning August 31, 2011 and ending October 5, participated in the two online surveys and completed all or most of the questionnaires.

In light of a limited research budget, the on-line methodology was selected as being the most cost-effective means to garner data. Other methods were considered (e.g. on-site personal interviews, telephone interviews, hard copies for patron use, etc.) but time, cost and confidentiality constraints precluded serious consideration of anything but an on-line format.

The questionnaires used in the on-line surveys were developed by EPIC • MRA in close consultation with Library of Michigan personnel directly responsible for developing their current SLAA five-year plan and who will be largely responsible for formulating the subsequent five-year plan pursuant to IMLS requirements. The lines of inquiry were formulated to assess whether or not the activities undertaken in the current plan through the state’s LSTA achieved the desired results. These lines of inquiry were designed to assist responsible Library of Michigan staff in determining the extent to which pursued strategies in implementing the plan achieved their intended purposes and the extent to which resource allocation in pursuit of the plan’s goals was effective.

Several efforts were made by the Library of Michigan to reach-out and invite patron participation at the 7 target libraries located in the Upper Peninsula communities of Marquette, Ironwood, Ishpeming, Calumet and Menominee, the northern lower Michigan community of Alpena, and the downriver community of Riverview in southeast Michigan. Despite these repeated attempts by Library of Michigan staff to encourage patron participation via messages to the target community library staff, only 26 patrons responded to the solicitation. It is noted that in a 2009 statewide on-line survey, data was collected from 2,868 patron respondents.

With the paucity of patron respondents from the 2011 survey of patrons in the seven aforementioned smaller Michigan communities, any attempt to provide statistically meaningful analysis of the data would be unenlightening.
Generally, in interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to error; that is, the results of the survey may differ from that which would have been obtained if the entire population was interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends on the total number of respondents asked a specific question. The table on the next page represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses based on sample size.

For example, 56 percent of all 562 staff respondents said, “A lot” when asked “How much would you say your library patrons use MeLCat?” (Question 8). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of approximately plus or minus 4.2 percent. That means that with repeated sampling, it is very likely (95 times out of every 100), that the percentage for the entire library staff population in Michigan would fall between 51.8 percent and 60.2 percent, hence 56 percent ±4.2 percent.

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Margin of error ± 14%

Percentage of sample giving specific response

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KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF LIBRARY STAFF

Many of the questions appearing on this 2011 statewide survey of library staff repeat questions that were posed in a statewide on-line survey of staff conducted in 2009. For most of these subsequent tests of the same questions, results are quite similar. For instance:

- Approximately two-thirds of staff-respondents from both studies report working at a, “public library”

- Just over one-in-five (22 percent in both 2009 and 2011) report their work as being in, “an academic library at either a 2-year or 4-year institution”.

- Slightly over ten percent in each of the surveys report their work as being with, “A K-12 school library or media center”.

Staff perceive MeLCat as being the most widely used Michigan eLibrary (MeL) service used by patrons, followed closely by the MeL database service, when combining responses asking staff to identify the first and second most used MeL service offerings. These two services combine to take 86 percent of the library staff responses when asked to name to the top two most-widely used MeL services by patrons.

- This result closely mirrors the 2009 survey result and, in fact, the figures for total usage are slightly higher in this later survey for the MeLCat service.

- Lack of staffing tops the list of reasons cited by respondents to a follow-up open-ended question asking why their library “Does Not” participate in this MeL service.
Of the staff professing to be in a position to know (77% of the entire sampling) virtually all of them – 96 percent of this “knowledgeable” cohort – reported that access to the MeL databases saves their organization money. It is noted that the 2011 data reveal a much smaller number of respondents who reported themselves as being “Not knowledgeable” about whether or not MeL databases save their organization money than did the 2009 survey – 23 percent “Not knowledgeable” in 2011 versus 35 percent in 2009.

Among the very diverse sizes of the organizations from which staff members responded, the amount estimated to have been saved ranged from under $10,000 to over $100,000, with a 32 percent plurality reporting, “Up to $10,000”, 23 percent reporting a savings of between $10,001 and $50,000, 14 percent claiming a savings of $50,001 to $100,000 annually and 5 percent of the entire sample reporting savings in excess of $100,000.

In response to related follow-up questions asking about the level of use of MeLCat and the MeL databases, the 2011 survey results show high levels of use reported (as measured by the descriptions of “A lot” and, “Somewhat”) by staff respondents, as was the case in 2009.

MeLCat use is reported at 97 percent - up 5 points from the 2009 study;

MeL databases usage is reported at 81 percent, down slightly from the 87 percent measured in the 2009 study.
Nearly six-in-ten staff respondents (59%) reported having received training through the Library of Michigan.

- Of those reporting having attended a Library of Michigan training seminar, the top sessions cited included:
  - Beginning workshop (39%);
  - Rural Libraries conference (18%);
  - New Directors’ session (16%);
  - Mahoney Children’s Workshop (11%); and,
  - Six other specific sessions at 7 percent or lower.

Virtually all of the attendees – 90 percent – reported the Library of Michigan training had helped them to provide service to their patrons either, “A lot” (49%) or at least, “Somewhat” (41%).

Fewer than half of all staff respondents – 42 percent – reported having attended a training session sponsored by the Michigan Library Association. The “Summer Reading Workshop”, “Fantastic Fiction”, “Spring Institute” and, “Academic Library Day” topped the list of at least eleven specific sessions mentioned by respondents.

- As with the Library of Michigan sessions, the vast majority of attendees (87%) found the Michigan Library Association sessions to be at least “Somewhat Helpful” in providing service to their patrons.

Least attended of the sessions tested were those sponsored by the Midwest Collaborative Association and funded by the Library of Michigan, with 36 percent of the staff respondents reporting having attended one of their training seminars. Of those who attended a session, MeL Database and MeLCat training sessions captured 94 percent of responses.
Notwithstanding being the least attended of the sessions tested, attendees of the Midwest Collaborative Association found the sessions to the most helpful in providing service to patrons, with 96 percent reporting them as being at least “Somewhat Helpful”. More important, however, is the 60 percent level reporting these sessions as being “Very Helpful”.

Over one-third of staff respondents (38%) reported being “Unaware” of the availability of tutorial videos for MeL users. Of the 61 percent professing awareness of the videos, roughly a third (34%) of this cohort reports having used them.

As with the sessions sponsored by the Midwest Collaborative Association, virtually all of the relatively few users of the videos (96%) found them to be “Helpful”, with 55 percent finding them to be “Very Helpful”.

- Of the above group, 70 percent reported having recommended them to their patrons.

At just 28 percent, respondents reporting specific awareness of MeL’s video tutorials for state government services such as how to apply for unemployment benefits, is much lower than awareness of the MeL videos generally. Moreover, even among the relatively few respondents who are aware of this particular video, only 12 percent report having used it. Given these low levels of use, measurements of helpfulness to the staff respondents and staff’s subsequent recommendation for use to patrons are not instructive.

For public library staff respondents (62% of the entire sampling), just under one-half (47%) reported knowledge that their facility participates in the Quality Services Audit Checklist – QSAC – Program.

- Of those knowing of participation in QSAC (N=164), just over two-thirds – or 67 percent – report that such participation has improved services for their patrons and an even two-thirds report that the QSAC has helped educate library trustees about services and library management.
Unlike the trustee edification, however, a 49 percent to 40 percent plurality of qualified respondents reported that QSAC has not helped educate local officials and other funding sources about their library’s services and management.

- Only 20 percent of the staff respondents responded “Yes” to a question asking whether or not their organization applied for a Library of Michigan sub-grant when it was made available. The majority – 54 percent – were “Undecided” on the matter.

- Among the 26 percent of respondents who reported “No” or “Undecided” to the initial inquiry about whether or not their library had applied for a sub-grant, a 28 percent plurality gave “Unaware of them or when they are offered” as the top reason for not applying among eleven other specific reasons cited by this cohort.

- Of the 112 respondents (out of 562 in the total sampling) who indicated their library had made application for a sub-grant, over two-thirds reported that the application process was understandable and easy to follow, with only six percent responding “No” to this inquiry and the 26 percent balance being “Undecided”.

- Most respondents – 78 percent – were either “Unaware” (73%) or, “Undecided” (5%) that project manuals were created for those organizations receiving LSTA grant funds.

- Even among those who are aware of the existence of the manuals (N=151), only 35 percent report ever having reviewed them and among this subset (N=53), fewer than half (43%) report that they have ever started a program or modified an existing one, based on the information provided in the manuals.

- For the remaining 24 respondents who qualified for the question, nearly all (94%) found the program started and/or modified by virtue of the information contained in the manuals to be “Helpful” to their patrons.

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