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Project Outcome: Year in Review

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# 2017 REPORT



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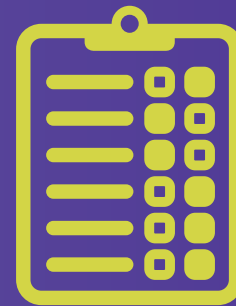
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017



## Wherever public libraries are working, **possibility lives.**

People who work in public libraries know that library services open new opportunities for anyone who enters — putting people on the path to literacy, technological know-how, or a better job. We see evidence of this every day — what libraries have long been missing is meaningful outcome data to support it.

Project Outcome is designed to help public libraries understand and share the impact of their programs and services by providing simple surveys and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing patron outcomes. The results can be used to demonstrate the value of library services, make improvements, determine how to allocate limited resources, and increase funding and partnership opportunities.



**67,300+**  
surveys  
collected



**320+**  
libraries with  
survey data

# Project Outcome impacts...

## GRANT WORK

A library staff member explained, “[Caregivers shared] how beneficial the program was, how they’re doing projects they wouldn’t have thought of to do at home..., using supplies that they don’t have at home... So, having that information, I could write a grant that shows **this is what the community wants, and we want to provide it.** And then, I also use the survey [results] to report during the grant period, talking about what the patrons liked most about the service, or programs...and what else they’d like to see the library doing.”

## PROGRAMMING DECISIONS

One library program manager explained, “Some of these workshops...were well-attended, but the feedback was such that we no longer offer [them]. It’s a matter of making sure that **it’s not just getting people in the door, but that people feel like it’s worth their time,** and it’s something that they can use. That when they leave...they’re in a position where they feel they’re more comfortable with whatever the topic was.”

## PARTNERSHIPS

A library partner said Project Outcome surveys tell her **“a lot about what the community needs, what each person’s needs are,** what else we could bring in, as far as technology is concerned, which is important as technology is changing pretty much every day now.”

## ADVOCACY

One library board member shared, **“The [outcome] data provides an objective story,** backing up much more engaging stories from staff about serving the community with objective numbers... [and] includes things the board may not think to ask for. This adds dimensions to how the board considers the library’s success in serving the community.”

## FUNDING REQUESTS

As explained by a library leader, **“It was information from Project Outcome that gave us the confidence to ask** the Friends [to fund the program], and to justify asking for that money.”



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**Project Outcome made significant improvements in its second year to improve the user experience** so that libraries would be better equipped to measure the outcomes of their programs and services, and the participation numbers reflect it!

The biggest change was to invest in building a new survey management tool. Evaluation data from 2016 showed that library staff needed a more flexible tool to help them measure program and service outcomes. To meet our users' needs, we built a survey tool that provides libraries the ability to better manage and customize their surveys, include up to three additional questions, and input and collect response data with ease. We also upgraded the interactive data dashboards, which now include a report-builder tool that offers more customized data reporting for libraries.

**PLA's Project Outcome staff hit the road,** participating in over 20 conferences across the United States and Canada, nearly doubling in-person outreach from Year 1. Our expanded outreach enabled Project Outcome to reach new audiences and bring awareness of the importance of outcome measurement, the free availability of the Project Outcome toolkit, and the extensive work and opportunities for public libraries provided by the Public Library Association. We learned that libraries still want and need the support Project Outcome offers and that outcome measurement is not yet "business-as-usual" for all libraries. Libraries of any size can measure outcomes and they want resources to help them get started and take action using the data they collect.

**The PLA Performance Measurement Task Force directed its energies toward launching new outcome measurement surveys.** These follow-up surveys are designed to help libraries capture patron-reported action. They are more specific and seek to answer the question, "What did you do with what you learned?"

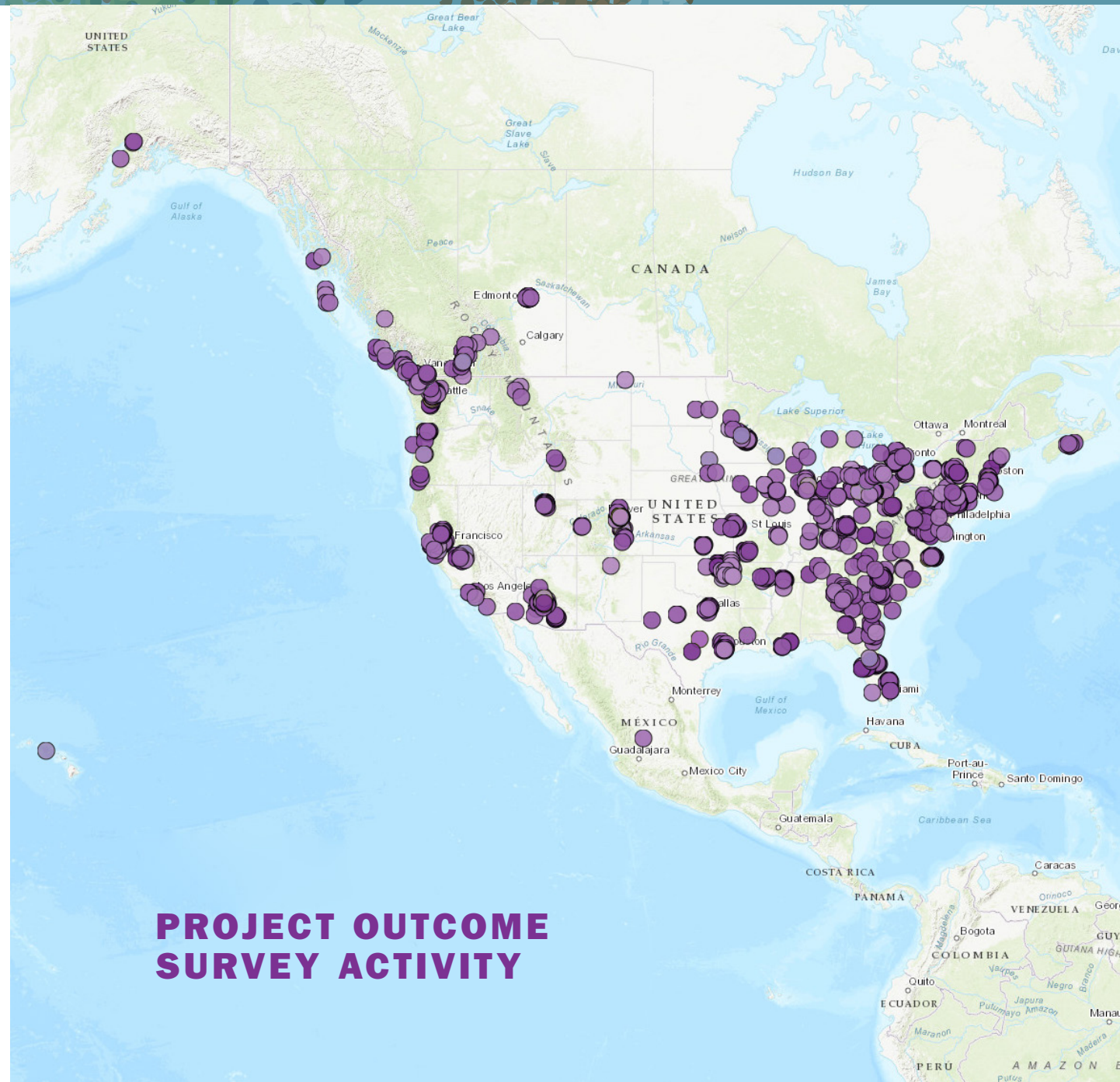
The task force also began the development of the Outcome Measurement Guidelines to help guide and support libraries with the following:

- Developing their own outcome measures;
- Implementing data collection methods other than the existing Project Outcome standardized surveys;
- Measuring outcome data over time; or,
- Developing strategies for working with partners on outcome measurement projects (e.g. contributions to community-wide initiatives).

## THE 2017 UPDATES HAD REAL IMPACT!

- **Almost 100 new libraries joined** the outcome measurement effort, with the number of libraries collecting survey data increasing from over 225 to 322.
- **The number of surveys collected more than tripled** from Year 1, increasing from more than 17,000 to over 67,000 patron surveys.

These increases demonstrate that there is demand in the public library field for this kind of work, that the Project Outcome website and its tools are something libraries are able to implement, and that the knowledge of outcome measurement and its use continues to grow.



## PROJECT OUTCOME SURVEY ACTIVITY

# Highlights

## What **Project Outcome** Did

### **Continued to make outcome measurement accessible to all libraries**

**Continued to provide libraries with ready-to-use patron surveys across 7 essential library service areas.**

Immediate surveys measure immediate patron benefit following a library service or program.

**Introduced new follow-up surveys and summer reading surveys.** Follow-up surveys measure if patrons changed their behavior or continued to benefit as a result of a program or service. Summer reading surveys are segmented by audience type – teen/child, adult, and caregiver – and measure patron benefit from summer reading programs.

**Built a custom-designed survey management tool** in response to direct user feedback.

**Updated the data dashboards and added a customized report builder tool** to support libraries with analyzing, interacting with, and taking action using their outcome results.

**Continued to create new resources** to support library adoption of Project Outcome, including the Speaker Wall of Fame, recognizing library staff that have presented about their Project Outcome experiences.

**Created a Peer Discussion Board** based on user feedback requesting more peer-to-peer engagement.

## What **Libraries** Did

### **Continued to adopt outcome measurement in their communities – more than twice as many as last year.**

**322 library systems collected outcome data using Project Outcome surveys.**

**Over 67,300 patron surveys, across 4,997 programs and services, were collected** within Year 2, an average of 416 surveys collected per month.

The most popular survey topics were education/lifelong learning, early childhood literacy, and digital learning.

**Increased the rate at which libraries ran their first survey**, increasing from 7% of registered libraries in Year 1 to 18.6% of registered libraries in Year 2.

**Created 120 customized reports** using the new report builder in the first two months of launching.

**Over the past two years, 50 library staff** have shared their experiences using Project Outcome, helping the field envision different ways to measure outcomes and use the resulting data to take action.

**Posted questions, shared ideas and answers, and connected** with users outside their library.



# Highlights

## What **Project Outcome** Did

### **Spread the word about why outcome measurement matters – and how Project Outcome can help**

**Provided practical guidance for adopting and implementing Project Outcome** to individual libraries, state libraries, and other groups at 1 free training held at ALA Annual Conference, 12 Project Outcome Regional Trainings (PORTs), and 16 webinars.

**Took Project Outcome on the road, presenting at 21 state, consortium, and partner conferences** around the country, nearly doubling the number of state-level conferences in Year 1.

**Continued to partner with organizations and leaders committed to helping libraries demonstrate their impact**, like the Association for Rural and Small Libraries, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), Research Institute for Public Libraries, ALA's Planning and Programming Office, Urban Libraries Council, and state library staff. New partnerships were formed with OCLC, University of Washington's Technology and Social Change Group, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, and COSLA's Measures that Matter effort.

**Kept our rapidly growing Project Outcome community informed** about how libraries across the country were adopting and implementing the surveys and shared monthly e-newsletters with more than 3,800 Project Outcome subscribers.

## What **Libraries** Did

### **Learned about outcome measurement and shared their experiences with one another**

More than **2,000 participants** joined Project Outcome webinars and just under 500 library staff attended PORTs in the U.S. and Canada.

Librarians and library leaders **joined Project Outcome presentations to share their experiences and encourage other libraries to implement outcome measurement**, connecting with over 1,100 library staff.

More than **920 libraries registered for project outcome** in the second year, from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. and Canada.



# Highlights

## What **Project Outcome** Did

### **Never stopped looking for ways to improve Project Outcome**

**Invited input and ideas** from Project Outcome users every step of the way:

- Mid-year evaluation for all users, to collect feedback on Project Outcome overall
- Evaluations after all in-person trainings to understand effectiveness and make improvements for 2018 trainings
- Evaluations after each webinar
- Input from champion libraries on how they are using the tools and data to make informed improvements

## What **Libraries** Did

### **Improved Project Outcome, so more libraries can benefit from outcome measurement**

Participated in evaluations and **shared what worked for them and why**. Evaluation results showed:

- Project Outcome increases library use of outcome data, particularly among smaller libraries
- Project Outcome increases participants' belief in the importance of using outcome data
- Most libraries that used outcome data reported benefits from such use
- Libraries that have implemented surveys are increasing support for outcome measurement and use
- Learning about Project Outcome directly from PLA is the most powerful on-ramp to data collection

Libraries also shared they learned a lot and felt confident implementing Project Outcome after attending an in-person training, but that improvements could still be made.

## What **Libraries** Did

### **Used survey results to improve their library programs and services and more**

- **To improve programming and better meet community needs.** The Plano (TX) Public Library used early childhood literacy surveys to identify gaps in their programming and create new Sensory Storytime and Storytime Around the World programs to meet the demands of their diverse community.
- **To track impact across time and strengthen library championship.** Appleton (WI) Public Library used summer reading surveys to inform program changes and track impact from 2016 to 2017. Sharing outcome results really resonated with their board and strengthened how they voice their support for the library.
- **To support partnership development and expand services at a small library.** Burnsville (WV) Public Library used summer reading survey results to partner with the local school district for teachers to provide tutoring at the library. They used digital learning survey results to secure a technology grant from the West Virginia Library Commission to upgrade and expand their computer lab in 2018.
- **To inform resource investment in online training services.** Thomas Crane (MA) Public Library used digital learning surveys to assess if the library's subscription to Lynda.com was generating meaningful outcomes for patrons. Results confirmed that patrons value the service and it helps them develop skills and knowledge across a range of topics.
- **To increase championship and create deepened community partnership.** Pima County (AZ) Public Library shared results from economic development and job skills surveys with their county leaders. As a result, the county administrator referred the One-Stop Career Center to the library to develop a collaborative partnership providing the community's youth with work experience and college and career readiness programming.

**As Project Outcome participation continues to increase, so does our ability to understand our community's needs.** We know that libraries want simple tools that make measuring outcomes as easy as possible and that outcome data, even a small amount, can be used in so many ways. We are so grateful for the ability to learn from our users and excited to share what we have learned together!

**The biggest barrier is getting started.** Once libraries measure outcomes, they are more likely to continue to measure. While the rate at which users are implementing surveys has increased, the majority of registered Project Outcome users have not collected survey data. Ongoing outreach, trainings, webinars and communications will likely continue to increase these rates, but this challenge is likely to persist.

**Leadership buy-in increases successful implementation.** The biggest facilitators of success in libraries'

use of Project Outcome included having a management-level driver or champion of outcome measurement; recognizing that Project Outcome met a particular need the library had; the quality of the Project Outcome tools and resources; and prior positive experience using data in support of library efforts.

**Outcome measurement activity evolves.** The more libraries measure, the smarter they get about how, when and where they want to collect outcomes. We hear from champion users that increased use makes them savvier about deciding which questions to ask to gather more detailed outcome data. They also become more knowledgeable about their community and can more easily identify and answer community needs.

**We haven't reached everyone...yet.** The expanded outreach in Year 2 proved critical in spreading the word about the availability of Project Outcome, especially at the state conference and Project Outcome Regional Training levels. Library staff, particularly those from small or rural systems, do not

have the finances to travel to the national ALA or PLA conferences. However, they do attend state or regional conferences. Attending these conferences allowed us to present to smaller groups, many of which had never heard of Project Outcome or engaged with PLA. The opportunity to reach new audiences was an incredible experience and we hope helped drive the field toward understanding and adopting outcome measurement.

**Libraries at any level can measure and use outcome data.** Project Outcome keeps its model simple with the expectation that libraries of any size could collect outcome data and take action using the results. And we are pleased that this approach has been successful. Small libraries are seeing a greater increase in outcome measurement usage relative to larger systems. We believe that if we had taken a more advanced approach to outcome measurement – one that had rigorous requirements around data collection and application – the adoption rates for smaller libraries would have been much smaller.

# What we learned together



## SURVEY RESULTS CONTINUE TO SHOW PATRONS VALUE LIBRARY PROGRAMS & SERVICES

In 2016, we learned that patrons tended to rate library programs and services high on the Likert scale of the Project Outcome immediate surveys, and an open-ended comment analysis pointed to patrons wanting more educational programming and more programs in general. These statistics have not changed much in 2017 and we continue to share these positive results in any conversation we have about the importance of public libraries in the community space.






**We also continue to see the word “more” in the open-ended comments. Overwhelmingly so. This one word – “more” – can help empower libraries to find new ways to expand what they are offering to reach more people.** We have heard from libraries using this data that they are able to advocate for more funding, new partnerships, and for additional programs or services to meet these kinds of requests.

## OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS BY SURVEY TOPIC






### KEY:

-  Common patron responses when asked what they liked most about the program
-  Common patron responses when asked what the library could do to improve






### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

-  Information about how to market yourself
  -  The speaker
  -  Books & links for future reference
  -  More specific classes for the type of business
- 






### CIVIC/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

-  Seeing the people (other attendees)
  -  The discussion
  -  Keep doing a great job
  -  More activities [like this]
- 






### EDUCATION/LIFELONG LEARNING

-  The presenter
  -  The fun & learning
  -  Keep up the good work
  -  Offer more programs/classes like this
- 






### DIGITAL LEARNING

-  The hands-on elements of the classes
  -  Learning new things
  -  Keep doing these programs
  -  Offer more classes
- 

### JOB SKILLS

-  One-on-one help
  -  The staff
  -  Expand hours (job center, help, etc.)
  -  Offer more classes
- 

### EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY

-  Interacting with other kids/with the program
  -  The variety of activities
  -  Keep doing a great job
  -  Offer more programs like this
- 

### SUMMER READING

-  The activities & programs
  -  That program motivates/encourages children to read more
  -  Keep doing a good job
  -  Offer programs during the school year/more programs
- 



## FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS

Like our Project Outcome users, we continue to look at new data we've gathered and learn from the results. In mid-2016, we launched follow-up surveys that help libraries gather patron-reported adoption data.

We have learned that follow-up surveys are not used as frequently as the immediate surveys and that they take more time to implement. However, when we look at the small numbers, they provide important information for libraries. **Patrons report that they are using what they learned to make real changes in their lives.**

## Percentages of patrons who say they are applying knowledge gained in library programs

### CIVIC/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



71%

Based on **48** total surveys collected and **94** total attendees reported\*

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



73%

Based on **24** total surveys collected and **12** total attendees reported\*

### DIGITAL LEARNING



80%

Based on **299** total surveys collected and **154** total attendees reported\*

### EDUCATION/LIFELONG LEARNING



77%

Based on **314** total surveys collected and **11,250** total attendees reported\*

### EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY



94%

Based on **806** total surveys collected and **2,993** total attendees reported\*

### JOB SKILLS



69%

Based on **37** total surveys collected and **62** total attendees reported\*

The survey response averages above were collected in the follow-up surveys from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. There is no data for summer reading because this topic does not have a follow-up survey.

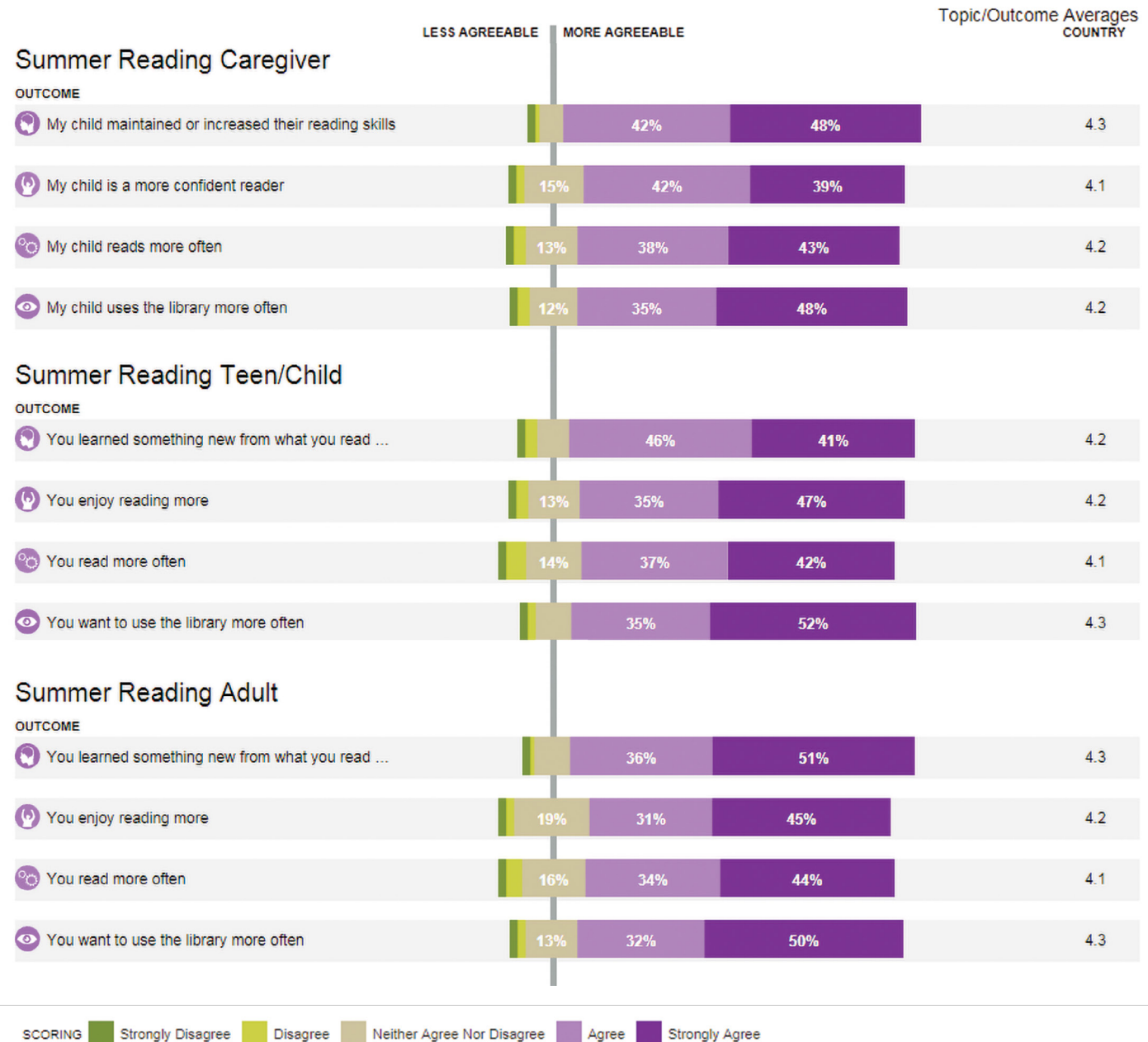
\*Not all libraries record attendance

# What we learned together

## SUMMER READING SURVEYS

Project Outcome introduced new summer reading surveys in 2016 with improved outcome questions across three audience types: adult, teen/child and caregiver. The resulting outcomes from the surveys, shown here, show that scores continue to remain relatively high with limited variance across audience type.

About half of the survey responses collected were from the caregiver perspective, followed by teen/child surveys, with the fewest responses coming from adult participants. Regardless of audience, when asked what the library could do to improve, the most common open-ended feedback received was the library was doing a good job.



# What's Next

**Project Outcome has two years under its belt and we can apply what we've learned so far to make more direct and impactful changes moving forward.**

- **Moving from building tools to fine-tuning them.** We made the biggest change to a new online system in Year 2 so that we can focus on fine-tuned improvements in Year 3. The new system also gives us greater visibility into how our users are interacting with the tools, which we can use to make improvements to the user experience.
- **Project Outcome will expand its partnership and sustainability efforts.** The current toolkit will continue to be available free of charge to U.S. and Canadian public libraries. In 2018, large library systems, consortium, state library and associations will be able to purchase Project Outcome Regional Trainings (PORTs) at the reduced cost of \$7,500 to \$7,000. Other Library Support Organizations will also be able to purchase the framework of the Project Outcome toolkit, so they can provide it to their own members.
- **Transitioning the Task Force to the Measurement, Evaluation and Assessment Committee:** The task force committed three years to creating the Project Outcome surveys and supporting their adoption in the field. PLA is deeply appreciative of their work and continues to rely on them for their expertise and guidance when it comes to reviewing requests from the field. The task force will be transitioning to a permanent committee with expanded responsibilities related to all PLA data collection efforts at ALA's Midwinter in 2018.
- **We still have a lot to learn and we need your help.** The field has taken great steps toward making outcome measurement "business-as-usual" but this work is far from finished. We look forward to continuing to hear from current and future Project Outcome users and learning how we can support their outcome measurement efforts as they evolve.



# Special Thanks

None of this work could have been possible without the active and generous support provided by the Performance Measurement Task Force. Their work in developing the outcome measures is the foundation of Project Outcome and it has truly helped to advance and impact the field. Thank you to those who contributed along the way.

## CHAIR

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## Appendix

**Aggregate Survey Results & Outreach:** <https://www.projectoutcome.org/pages/3>

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[www.projectoutcome.org](http://www.projectoutcome.org)