

Project Outcome Evaluation: Mid-Year Survey Results Summary

February 2016

Project Outcome is aimed at transforming strategic decision making, planning, and advocacy efforts at public libraries by making accessible the tools and resources they need to collect and use outcome data. It is led by the Public Library Association (PLA) and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The cornerstones of Project Outcome are 1) a set of easily deployable patron surveys corresponding to different types of library programs that were developed and piloted by field experts comprising the Performance Measurement Taskforce (PMTF), and 2) a web-based portal for data entry, automated analysis and reporting, and interactive data visualizations.

During a June 2015 preconference of the American Library Association Annual Conference, Project Outcome was launched with a 7.5-hour orientation and training attended by 105 public library staff and leaders. Since then, participants have registered for Project Outcome after learning about it via PLA communications, online and in-person events hosted by PLA, or word of mouth.

As part of a multi-year program evaluation, in early December 2015 ORS Impact administered an online survey of all library staff who registered with Project Outcome through early November 2015 (N=413). The Mid-Year Survey was designed to provide information to PLA and the PMTF that would help them 1) optimize participants' experience of the project, and 2) develop new tools and resources for measuring long-term patron outcomes.

This memo summarizes results based on data collected with the Mid-Year Survey. An assessment of program outcomes will occur in June 2016 (see Appendix A for intended outcomes of participation in the Project Outcome Theory of Change).

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Key Findings

Following are six key findings based on 213 respondents to the Mid-Year Survey.

- 1. The rate of resource access is high (75%)** among responding libraries.
 - Participants who attended the launch were more likely than others to have accessed project resources (86% vs. 72%).
 - However, the respectable rate of access among those who registered more recently suggests that initial engagement through informal channels (e.g., word of mouth, visiting project website) is also effective for motivating early engagement.
- 2. There are a number of ways project content and functionality align well with participant needs; however, participants want improvements in accessibility and flexibility**, particularly
 - easier access to resources either by reducing actions required to gain access or by making them easier to find;
 - more flexibility in survey design, including content and formatting; and
 - more flexibility in portal functions, primarily related to aggregating or disaggregating data and developing the charts and reports.
- 3. Most respondents maintain awareness of project happenings**, primarily via emails from project staff, their preferred vehicle; however there are opportunities to tailor project email communications frequency based on participant preference and improve communication around key messages.
- 4. Participants clearly want opportunities for peer networking or information exchange**, primarily to support outcome measurement practice and use, and particularly in at-least-partly structured online venues.
- 5. Participants from smaller libraries may need more motivation or support** to move from registration to accessing resources and possibly survey implementation, as well as to engage in peer networking or information exchange opportunities.
- 6. Participant input related to advanced tool development suggests that in addition to offering surveys for measuring long-term outcomes, building skills for using third party data could provide the most “bang for the buck.”**



Methods

The online Mid-Year Survey was administered over a two-week period in December 2015 to all library participants who registered for Project Outcome through early November 2015. Project Outcome staff provided ORS Impact with a list of registered library participants, as well as participants' roles at the library, their contact information, and the name and NCES code of the library where they are employed. The latter was used to merge IMLS data on library size (i.e. library service area) with survey responses.

Response

- The survey response rate was 43% (213), and responses represented just under 50% of registered libraries.
- Response was much stronger among launch participants than among those who registered for Project Outcome after the launch (70% vs. 36%).
- Response did not vary by library size.

About the Survey Participants

- Respondents were most commonly those who had registered after the launch event (79%, remaining attended launch) and work in US public libraries (86%; remaining from libraries in Canada).
 - They hailed from 33 US states and four Canadian provinces.
- They were most commonly directors (41%), followed by other library leaders/managers (34%) and other staff members (26%).
 - Smaller libraries were most likely to be represented by directors and larger libraries were more likely to be represented by other types of managers and staff.

Data Considerations

For the purpose of the survey—to provide directional input and feedback from participants to inform program improvement and content development—the resulting data are more than sufficient. Obtaining a higher rate of response, particularly among non-launch participants will be more important for Year 1 follow-up data collection, which will assess program outcomes.

Response to some open-ended questions was limited. When reporting results based on open-ended questions we note the number of responses and the proportion of responses out of those possible.

Because so few individuals who work in smaller public libraries attended the launch, we cannot, at this point, disentangle relations between engagement in the project and registration vehicle (launch versus other), length of time engaged, and library size. Similarly, because participant role at the library (director versus other) is also related to library size, it is also difficult to disentangle relations between role and project engagement.



As more participants take advantage of different registration vehicles, we will be in a better position to explore independent influences of registration vehicle, library size, and participant role at the library on engagement and outcomes. In the meantime, Mid-Year Survey results related to these factors should be considered preliminary.

Detailed Findings and Potential Discussion Points

This Mid-Year Survey provided interesting findings and raised intriguing questions. It also provided some direction for future evaluation efforts. Below are detailed results and emergent discussion questions related to the five topics covered in the survey:

- **Supporting Early Engagement in Project Outcome:** Rates of project web resource access by registration vehicle and participant characteristics
- **Alignment of Project with Participant Needs:** Experiences navigating the project website, accessing resources, implementing surveys, using the data portal, and using results
- **Supporting Successful Communications:** Experience of project communications
- **Supporting Peer Networks and Information Exchange:** Interests and input related to venue, structure, and topics of peer networks and information exchange
- **Input Related to Advanced Tool Development:** Capacity, likelihood of use, and needs related to long-term outcome measurement

Supporting Early Engagement in Project Outcome

The rate of resource access is high among responding libraries. Participants who attended the launch were more likely than others to have accessed project resources; however, the respectable rate of access among those who registered more recently suggests that initial engagement through informal channels (e.g., word of mouth, visiting project website) is also effective for motivating early engagement.

Finding 1

Project resource access is high among participants.

- At this early stage, 75% (144) of survey respondents reported they had accessed project resources.



Finding 2

The preconference launch was an effective way to promote early engagement in Project Outcome among staff from larger libraries.¹

- Those who attended launch were significantly more likely to have accessed web resources (86% vs. 72%, $p < .05$).
- As stated above, 70% of launch attendees completed the Mid-Year Survey (compared to 36% of others).

Finding 3

Potential participants from libraries of all sizes do not need to participate in an event to be moved to register for Project Outcome; informal channels (e.g., word of mouth, visiting project website) are also effective.

- Among those who had not attended launch (168), 75% learned about it from project website or someone else then registered.
- The remaining participants learned about it from a project webinar then registered (20%) or learned about it at in-person meeting hosted by the project then registered (5%).

Finding 4

Participants from smaller libraries may need more motivation or support to moving from registration to resource access and possibly survey implementation.

- Staff from smaller libraries² were less likely to have accessed web resources (64% vs. 81%, $p < .05$)

Finding 5

Resource access is dependent on role at the library—directors are least likely to have accessed resources, other managers are most likely, and staff fall in between.

- 67% of directors, 73% of staff, and 87% of other managers had accessed web resources ($p < .05$).

Discussion Points

Does the differential rate of web resource access by library size and role have implications for outreach, communications, and/or support?

Evaluation note: *Future analysis should explore relations between participant factors, time-since-registered, and early engagement so we can understand better what might explain longer lags between registration and use of project resources.*

¹ This finding is qualified as applicable to *larger* libraries because almost all library attendees at the launch event were from larger libraries. Future evaluation will be better able to explore variation in early engagement among the broader population of libraries.

² “Smaller libraries” refers to single-outlet libraries with a 65,000 or fewer LSA.



Alignment of Project with Participant Needs

There are a number of ways **project content and functionality align well with participant needs**. Participants report the website is navigable, the how-tos and step-by-step processes are especially helpful, and the surveys are easy to understand and implement successfully. However, **participants want improvements in accessibility and flexibility**, particularly easier access to resources either by reducing actions required to gain access or by making them easier to find; more flexibility in survey design, including content and formatting; and more flexibility in portal functions, primarily related to aggregating or disaggregating data and developing the charts and reports.

Finding 6

There are a number of ways project content and functionality align with participant needs.

- 71% of respondents find Project Outcome **website navigation** pretty easy or very easy (68% and 3%, respectively)
- When asked for the types of **information or resources** that were most helpful, respondents' most common responses were
 - related to **implementation practice**, e.g., tutorials, how-tos, step-by-step processes, and best practices (29% of 35³); and
 - about the **survey tools and items** (23% of 35).
- When asked to describe something that went well when implementing the surveys, respondents' most common responses were
 - related to **survey content or ease of survey implementation** (55% of 38⁴), and
 - 26% spoke specifically about the **paper surveys**.

The step-by-step explanations and links are wonderful.

The section that detailed the . . . Outcome Measurement Process. . . . It was helpful for us to know what the process looked like before proceeding.

Customers were receptive . . . surveys used simple language and communicated outcomes with participants.

Paper surveys have the most success. Physically handing them the paper with a pen gets the most results.

[The surveys were] very easy for staff and for patrons.

³ This is 24% of those who had accessed project resources online.

⁴ This is 57% of those who had implemented surveys.



Finding 7

Participants found survey results useful, particularly for validating program quality.

- When asked to describe something positive that came out of reviewing the results the most common responses related to how the results
 - validated program quality or a particular aspect of a program (48% of 24⁵);
 - increased their awareness more generally, particularly related to benchmarking against the national data (24%); and
 - gave them ideas for program improvement (24%).

The written comments really validated what we provide as an incentive as well as a something new we tried this year - having activities out all the time rather than just some times.

Liked to compare our library's averages with the national ones. Gives us a good idea as to how we're doing relative to other participating libraries.

I learned that library resources should have been a part of both programs that were surveyed—this was concrete feedback that was very helpful.

I discovered that one of the programs we're offering is more effective than I thought.

Finding 8

Participants have an appetite for even more implementation practice support (e.g., how-tos, utilization examples), both from project staff and from peers.

- When asked to describe types of information or resources that are the most important to improve or add, the most common response was more webinars, trainings, or resources related to implementation practice, including best practices for measuring outcomes for different programs or example items; training on survey implementation; information on sharing results with different stakeholders; and a resource explaining what they can and cannot do with the current surveys, portal functionality, and results products (38% of 24⁶).
- When asked to describe what they hoped to get out of networking or information exchange with other participating libraries, the most common response related to implementation practice (88% of 129⁷).
- When asked to describe challenges they faced when implementing surveys, the most common response related to patron response or participation, suggesting the need for more (or more accessible) information and resources to support best practices in data collection, in particular (38% of 29⁸).

⁵ This is 56% of those who had reviewed results.

⁶ This is 17% of those who had accessed resources online.

⁷ This is 62% of those who were interested in participating in such networks.

⁸ This is 43% of those in libraries that had implemented surveys.



Are there editable templates or ideas for presenting the data to internal and/or external clients?

I'd like to know how others are using the Project Outcome tools, how they are using the information they gather to communicate value, and what actions they are taking as a result of what they learn.

The online and linked surveys are not getting any traffic. Hard to get people to stop and do ANOTHER survey.

Whenever you have early literacy surveys it's hard to corral all of the caregivers to complete them.

Need more and better marketing materials for promoting the surveys.

Finding 9

Accessibility and flexibility/customizability are consistently identified as areas needing improvement.

- When asked to describe types of information or resources they looked for on the website but were not able to find, the most common responses described a difficulty finding or gaining access to what they needed (42% of 36⁹); finding or accessing the surveys in particular (33% of 36); and understanding portal functionality, particularly related to having multiple users within one library system (22% of 36).
- When asked to describe types of information or resources that are the most important to improve or add, the second, third, and fourth most common responses, respectively, related to better access to resources and portal functionality (25% of 24¹⁰); increased flexibility around reporting and data-sharing (21% of 24) and increased flexibility or customizability in survey development (21% of 24).
- When asked to describe challenges they faced when implementing surveys, the second most common response related to desires for more flexibility in survey design (31% of 29¹¹).
- When asked to describe challenges experienced during results review, the most common response related to limited functionality within the portal, particularly around aggregation and disaggregation of survey results (43% of 14¹²).

⁹ This is 25% of those in libraries that had accessed online resources.

¹⁰ This is 17% of those in libraries that had accessed online resources.

¹¹ This is 43% of those in libraries that had implemented surveys.

¹² This is 31% of those in libraries that had reviewed results.



It's worth considering how many barriers you want to have to allowing libraries to begin using the tools.

[We need] easy access to information about the program. Have not yet been able to access tools or other resources because we have not yet completed our profile.

Working in a large organization, it has to be easier, more intuitive for multiple people to be able to access site, create surveys, etc. If everyone using has to go through such an extensive training process, utilizing outcome surveys, etc. becomes more difficult.

. . . it is just not clear to me how we are to use this as an organization. We need to be able to have individuals responsible for their surveys and deadlines, and for admin and managers to see the results. This is not how it seems to be structured.

We had existing surveys that were required by our program partners so we ended up having to ask patrons to fill out two one-page surveys on the same document. Sometimes people only filled out one survey. It would have been good to be able to combine the questions, but the inflexibility of the tool prevented that.

I would like more flexibility with the results, such as ways of combining the results of specific programs.

Discussion Points

What are actions PLA can take to increase awareness and understanding of existing flexibility and functionality related to developing surveys and using the portal?

Is it worth considering options for decreasing limitations or barriers to access of particular resources? Might it be appropriate to develop a resource explaining rationales or reasons for existing limitations?

Is it worth considering options for increasing flexibility in survey design and portal functions, particularly related to aggregation and disaggregation of results, and chart or report design? Might it be appropriate to develop a resource explaining rationales or reasons for existing functionality?



Supporting Successful Communications

Most respondents maintain awareness of project happenings, primarily via emails from project staff, their preferred vehicle; however there are opportunities to tailor project email communications frequency based on participant preference and improve communication around key messages.

Finding 10

Respondents overwhelmingly maintain awareness of project happenings, primarily via emails from project staff, their preferred vehicle.

- 93% of respondents maintain awareness of what's happening with Project Outcome. Of those,
 - 86% maintain awareness through email message sent by project staff
 - 45% through checking the project website
 - 36% through PLA communications (e.g., e-News or PL Online)
 - 34% through regular attendance at scheduled webinars
 - 22% through Facebook notifications (18%) and/or checking project Facebook page (8%)
 - 6% through others in their library
- Most respondents prefer to receive information from the project via email (80%), followed by regularly scheduled webinars (12%).

Finding 11

There is an opportunity to tailor project email communications frequency based on participant preference.

- In terms of frequency, half prefer to receive project communications as frequently as the need arises; 29% would prefer a monthly digest, 19% a weekly digest, and 2% prefer to seek out information themselves.
- Preferred frequency did not differ by role.

Finding 12

Low awareness of advanced tool development suggests an opportunity to improve communications around key messages.

- 39% of respondents were aware Project Outcome is developing a new set of advanced tools.
- Respondents were significantly more likely to be aware of advanced tools development if they
 - were launch participants (61% vs. 33%, $p < .001$),
 - tried to access web resources (45% vs. 21%, $p < .01$), or
 - attend regularly scheduled webinars (59% vs. 32%, $p < .001$).



Discussion Points

What are tactics PLA can use to maximize the chance that participants receive key messages?

To raise the likelihood that participants welcome and consume project email communications, does PLA want to consider tailoring email communications frequency based on preferences collected during registration?

Supporting Peer Networks or Information Exchange

There is a clear interest among participants in having opportunities for peer networking or information exchange, primarily to support outcome measurement practice and use, and particularly in at-least-partly structured online venues.

Finding 13

Participants clearly want opportunities for peer networking or information exchange, particularly those who have already demonstrated early engagement.

- 94% of participants reported interest in networking or information exchange with other project participants (39% yes, 55% maybe).
- Of all the open-ended questions on the Mid-Year Survey, the questions about peer networking received the largest proportion of responses, by far.

Finding 14

Participants from smaller libraries may need more motivation or support to engage in peer networking and information sharing.

- Staff from smaller libraries were less likely to
 - be certain about interest in networking (smaller: yes 25% and maybe 68% vs. yes 45% and maybe 50%, $p < .05$), or
 - attend an in-person networking event (smaller: 33% vs. 50%, $p < .05$).

Finding 15

Participants are most interested in information from peers that supports project-related practice, followed by that which supports using and/or sharing results.

- When asked to describe what they hoped to get out of networking or info exchange with other participating libraries,
 - 88% (of 129¹³) described something related to **project-related practices**;

¹³ This is 62% of those who were interested in participating in such networks.



- 43% described something related to **analyzing or using the results**, most commonly sharing the results/communicating library value to external audiences;
- 31% described something related to **outcome measurement or data collection**, most commonly wanting to learn about other methods for collecting outcomes;
- 18% percent wanted to hear about **challenges experienced** and 11% wanted to hear about **success stories**; and
- 8% spoke to the **value to connecting** with others around a common interest.

Implementation tips . . . and how others are utilizing in alignment with their strategic plan.

. . . how others are using the Project Outcome tools, how they are using the information they gather to communicate value, and what actions they are taking as a result of what they learn.

Best practices for measuring outcomes for library devices.

I'm always interested in hearing how the surveys are working for other libraries and if they have implemented something that has encouraged a higher response rate.

Exchange of ideas on how using, what challenges faced and how overcome, what else is being done in this area, how this fits into other efforts.

I don't think we spend enough time brainstorming ideas together - we need that to address the critical issues facing our libraries today.

Finding 16

Online venues are most likely to attract the most participants, including scheduled events and an online forum that allows ongoing access.

- Among those who expressed an interest in networking or information sharing with other project participants (199),
 - 83% indicated they were likely to participate in scheduled online event (31% very likely);
 - 77% indicated they were likely to participate in an online forum accessible at any time (34% very likely); and
 - 44% indicated they were likely to participate in an in-person event (10% very likely).
- Other suggestions for venues included a listserv, teleconference or videoconference, and access to a participant contact list.



Finding 17

In a networking forum participants would appreciate having some structure (e.g., around a particular topic or case) and opportunity for discussion or problem-solving.

- When asked to describe aspects of peer networking venue that would be crucial for the experience meeting their needs,
 - 22% (of 47¹⁴) spoke to the **importance of having some structure to the event**, such as around a particular topic, survey or case of focus;
 - 22% spoke to the **importance of there being opportunity for interaction**, particularly small group discussion; and
 - a few (7%) spoke to the **importance of having a moderator and/or access to project staff**.

It's helpful to have short presentations on some topic and then be able to dig into details with a small group. Helps me to move info from short term memory into relevant ideas for the longer term.

They would be moderated. Questions, concerns or topics could be submitted ahead of time by participants to moderators so that the exchange would be focused. Send agenda to participants ahead of time so that they can be prepared to respond to specific items by having data or report information available to share.

Discussion Points

Is the level of participant-reported interest in peer networking reflected in rates of attendance at networking and information sharing events hosted by PLA? If not, what might account for that?

Are current and/or planned networking and information exchange opportunities aligned with participants' preferences that they provide some structure, maximize opportunity for discussion and problem-solving among participants, and provide information and examples of using Project Outcome data in their libraries and communities?

¹⁴ This is 38% of those who were interested in participating in such networks.



Input Related to Advanced Tool Development

Participant input related to advanced tool development suggests that in addition to offering surveys for measuring long-term outcomes, building skills for using third party data could provide the most “bang for the buck.”

Finding 18

Of the long-term outcome measurement methods being considered for development, participants are most likely to use follow-up surveys and third party data in both the near and long term.

- At least three quarters of participants report a medium or high likelihood their libraries would use surveys and third party data to assess long-term patron outcomes; under two thirds provide those estimates for interviews and focus groups (see Figure 1).

Finding 19

Participant input suggests building skills for using third party data could provide the most “bang for the buck.”

- In addition to results related to use likelihood (see above), more participants report high or medium skills and capacity among staff at their libraries for using for using surveys and third party data, which provides a good foundation for potential supports and valuable peer networking and information sharing (see Figure 1).

Finding 20

There is demand particular tools and knowledge or skills related to measuring long-term outcomes.

- When asked to describe tools or information that would be helpful for measuring long-term outcomes,
 - 50% (of 22¹⁵) wanted tools for tracking and/or storing other types of relevant data at the individual patron level, e.g., to better track the library usage across multiple interfaces and to store personal information for the purpose of follow-up measurement;
 - 45% wanted knowledge and skills relevant to long-term outcome measurement and use, most commonly related to interpreting and analyzing data, telling their story with long-term data, developing measures, and learning from other libraries' experiences.
- Respondents were most likely to use long-term outcome measurement results for program planning (88%) and internal decision making (87%), followed by making program adjustments (81%) and advocacy (73%).

¹⁵ This is 10% of all respondents.



The types of questions that should be asked when trying to measure long term customer outcomes.

I would love to see PLA lead the way in developing CRM practices/software for public libraries.

Data analytics to follow library user patterns and trends.

[Best practices regarding how to] couple our output measures with our outcome measures to present the fullest picture of our services and their impact on our community.

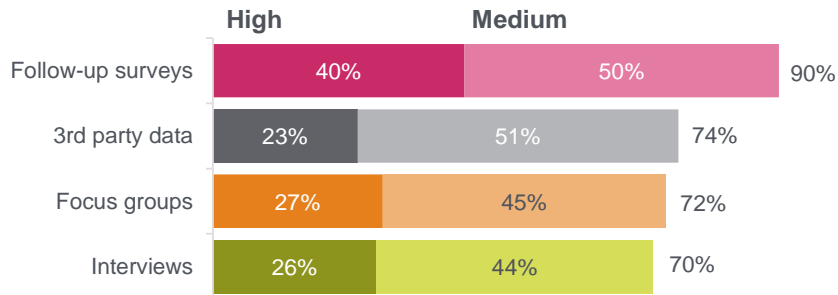
Discussion Points

What may PLA do in response to appetite for tools to track and store other types of individual-level data relevant to data assessing, tracking, and making sense of long-term outcome data?

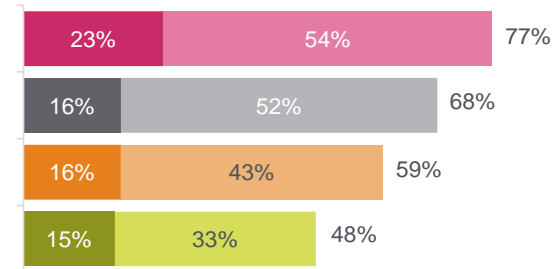
What knowledge- and skill-needs are specific to analyzing, understanding, and using long-term outcome data? What are the best ways to fulfill those needs?

Figure 1 | Participants' estimated levels of staff skills (A), staff capacity (B), library likelihood of near-term use (C), and library likelihood long-term use (D) for each method being considered for advanced tool development (N=178)

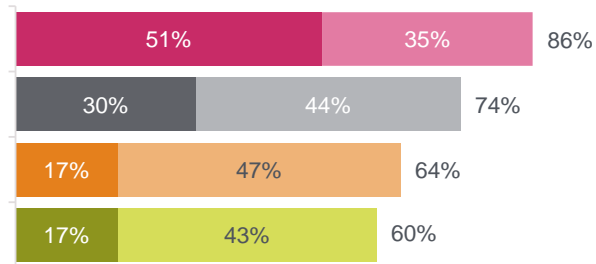
A. Estimated levels of staff skills for using each method being considered



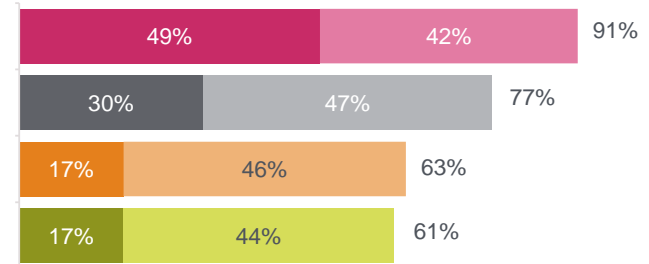
B. Estimated levels of staff capacity for using each method being considered



C. Estimated library likelihood of using in the near term each method being considered



D. Estimated library likelihood of making "business as usual" each method being considered



APPENDIX A: Theory of Change for Project Outcome

Outcome Map for Project Outcome (2015-2017)

Resources

- PLA Leadership & Staff
- PLA Publications & Conferences
- Performance Measures Task Force
- Project Outcome Technology Infrastructure
- Project Outcome Surveys
- Materials, Webinars & Training

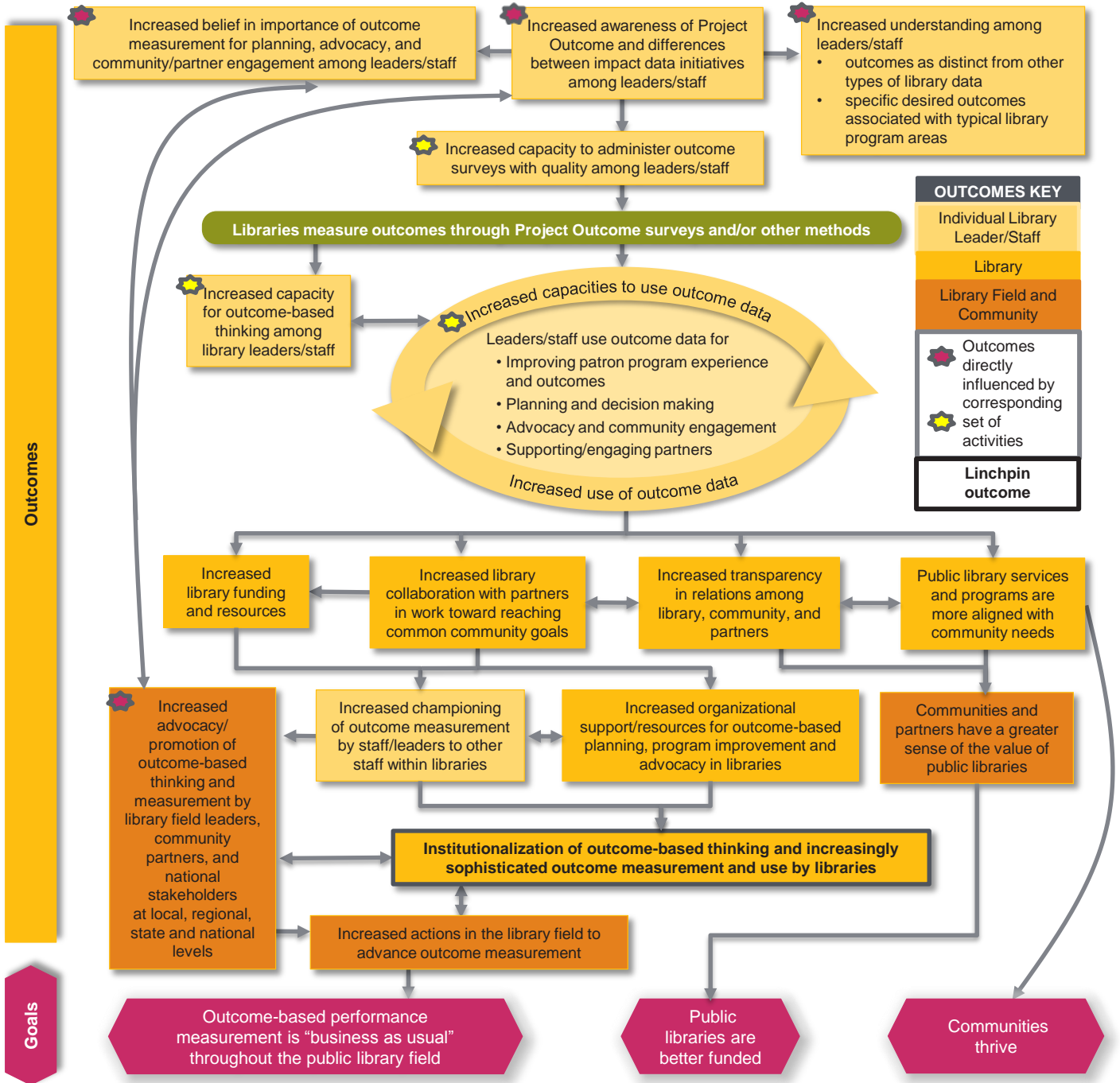
Activities

Engage Libraries and Support Field-level Movement Building

- Develop messages for Beginners, Enthusiasts and Champions
- Push communications out to the field
- Activate and support champions within and external to the library field
- Educate/Engage stakeholders at the national level

Support Outcome Measurement & Use of Outcome Data

- Provide access to outcome surveys and materials designed to meet differentiated needs of Beginners and Enthusiasts
- Provide training and webinars designed to meet needs of Beginners and Enthusiasts
- Provide structure/venues for communities of practice among participants



Outcomes

Goals