

Executive Summary

Public Library Association

Project Outcome

Year 1 Follow-up Evaluation Findings

December 2016





Introduction

Launched in 2015, 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.

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 Task Force (PMTF)
- 2) a set of web-based tools** for data entry, automated analysis and reporting, and interactive data visualizations.

An outcome refers to a specific benefit that results from a library program or service. Outcomes are often expressed as changes that individuals perceive in themselves—like new or improved knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior, or status. *Outcome data* is the information collected to understand what changes are happening.

The initiative is led by the Public Library Association (PLA) and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

According to Project Outcome's Theory of Change, if PLA provides tools and training, and engages the broader public library field to support outcome measurement, there will be increased belief in the importance of outcome measurement; engagement in outcome measurement; and use of outcome data for program improvement, planning and decision making, advocacy and community engagement, and partner engagement within public libraries. These increases will, in turn, result in increased library funding and library-community alignment, as well as positive changes for communities and increased local- and field-level support for outcome measurement.

This document summarizes nine key findings related to outcome progress and implementation experiences based on data collected through an online participant survey (n=707; 34% of all individuals registered in the program by September 2016), outcome data user interviews (n=23), and State Library agency interviews (n=8 interviews with 15 individuals), as well as administrative data provided by PLA. The full set of results was shared with Project Outcome staff during a learning debrief in December 2016.



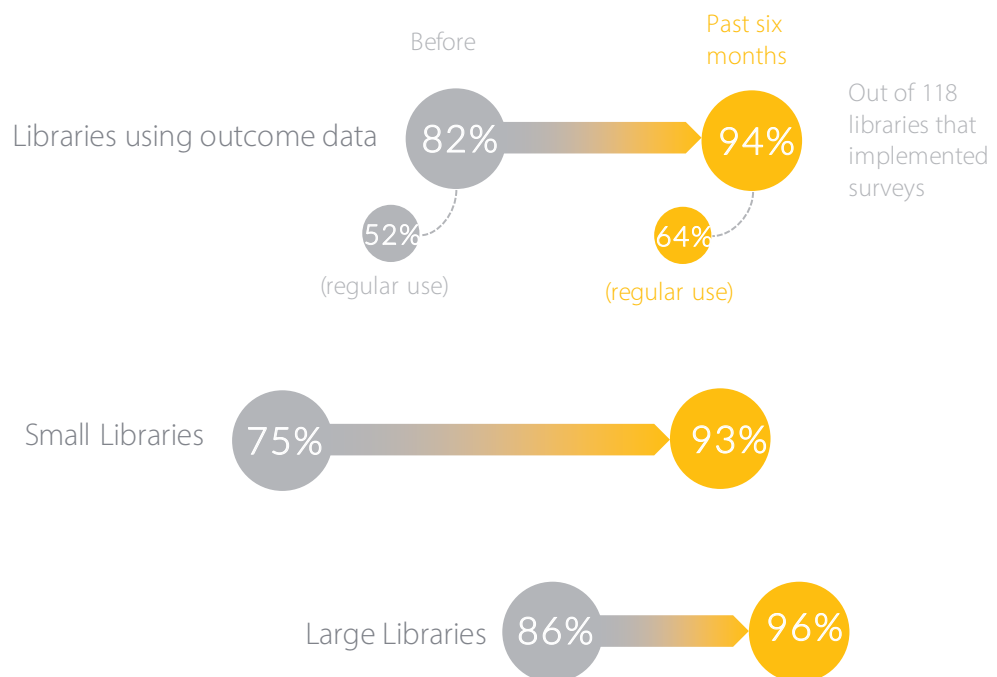
Key Findings

Participation Outcomes

1 Project Outcome increases library use of outcome data, particularly among smaller libraries

Among responding libraries that implemented Project Outcome surveys, more used outcome data in the past six months compared to before participating in Project Outcome, including for program improvement, communicating the value of the library to funders or decision makers and the public, informing or measuring progress on strategic plans, or supporting or engaging partners.

Additionally, the increase in use of outcome data was greater among smaller libraries (n=28) than larger libraries (n=79) with 18% more smaller libraries having used outcome data in the past six months versus 10% more larger libraries.



2 Project Outcome increases participants' belief in the importance of using outcome data

Participating individuals (n=577) valued the use of outcome data more than before participating in Project Outcome to a statistically significant degree, particularly for purposes like program improvement, communicating the value of the library, informing or measuring progress, and supporting or engaging partners.

In addition, the perceived increase in the value of using outcome data for these purposes was larger to a statistically significant degree among those who had used outcome data in the past six months.



Individuals that use outcome data are more likely to value it.

3 At this early stage, most responding libraries that used outcome data reported benefits from such use

Libraries that experienced these impacts made up over half (58%) of those that used outcome data.

Slightly over half reported it **helped the library have a bigger impact.**

51%

A little under half reported it **helped the library reach more people with the same amount of resources**, possibly a result of better marketing.

45%

Over a third of libraries reported it **led to the library either getting more funding or non-monetary resources** from a new or prior source.

35%

23% Monetary

22% Non-monetary

4 Since participating in Project Outcome, libraries that have implemented surveys are increasing support for outcome measurement and use

In the past six months, **many more libraries supported an opportunity for their staff to come together and share experiences and ideas**; some participants described increased sharing of best practices and examples in informal discussions and conversations with colleagues.



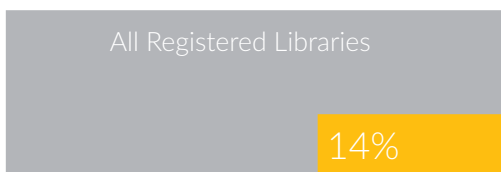
More libraries also allotted time on board and staff meeting agendas to **discuss outcome-based results**.



More libraries **assigned staff time to outcome measurement**.

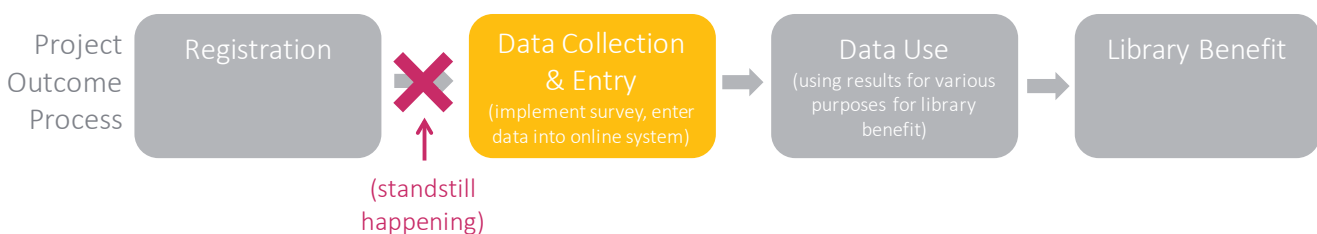


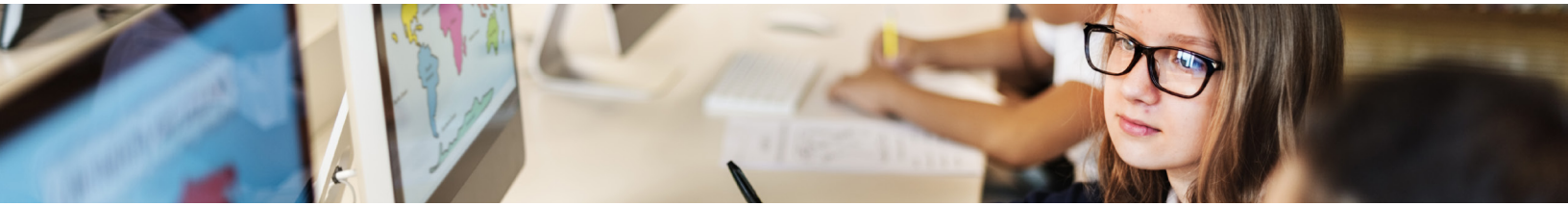
5 Many participants are not moving from project registration to data collection



As of September 2016, only 14% of libraries registered with Project Outcome had implemented at least one of the seven Immediate Surveys and entered them into the online system. This precludes the achievement of positive outcomes through data use.

of libraries have made it to Data Collection & Entry



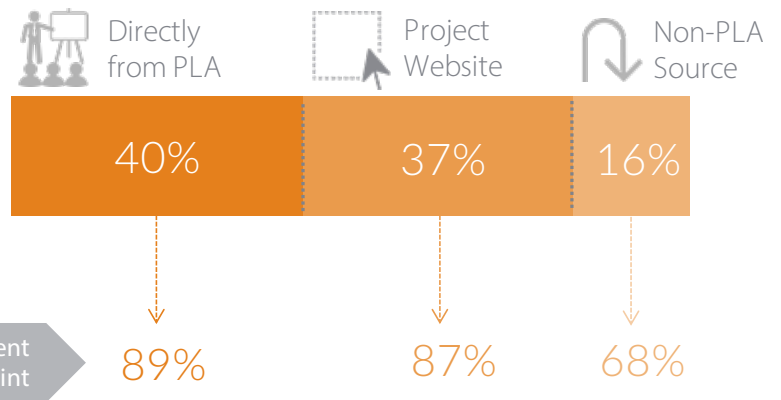


Key Findings

Implementation

6 Learning about Project Outcome directly from PLA is most powerful “onramp” to data collection.

Responding participants learned the most about Project Outcome directly from PLA (e.g., through in-person training or webinar; 37%) and from the project website. Similar proportions felt each of those were sufficient starting-off points. Learning about Project Outcome from a non-PLA source (e.g., another library staff member) was less common and less likely to be perceived as a sufficient starting off point. Those who learned directly from PLA were more likely to be in libraries that implemented the Project Outcome surveys (46% vs. 27%).



7 Webinars facilitate outcome data collection and use, but relatively few participants attend (live)



of registered participants have taken part in a live webinar.

Among survey and interview respondents, Project Outcome webinars were among the top-cited facilitators of outcome data collection and use. Participants were also more likely to be in a library that implements a Project Outcome survey if they attended a live webinar (56% vs. 30%).

8

Many of the top-cited barriers and facilitators to data collection and use affirm Project Outcome’s current direction and could inform the development of resources

Among the top-cited program-level facilitators of outcome data collection and use, were...



a streamlined, well-developed toolkit



inclusion of open-ended questions on the patron surveys



summary reports

Many of the top-cited barriers to collecting and using outcome data—related to flexibility of the survey and functionality of the project’s survey portal—are being addressed in the May 2017 updates to the project website and tools, including a more flexible survey design.

Consistent with oft-cited barriers and facilitators, some participants asked for additional resources or best practices related to communicating value of library outcome measurement to various audiences (particularly fellow library staff and leaders), avoiding survey overload among patrons, addressing particular patron concerns, and optimizing online survey administration. In addition to the website updates, Project Outcome will continue to publish training resources to help libraries in these areas.

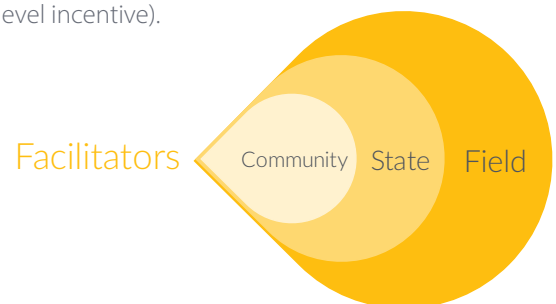
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Some top-cited facilitators of outcome data collection and use suggest potential leverage points for Project Outcome support and outreach beyond participants

Community-level facilitators included existing collaborative community-based efforts that also value using outcome measurement to inform strategy/service refinement and library funder belief in importance of outcome measurement.

State-level facilitators included positive perceptions of Project Outcome among State Library agency staff, as well as State Library agency and State Library Association encouragement and support for measuring outcomes, presentations/trainings at state-level and regional meetings, and, potentially, a state requirement to measure and/or report outcomes.

Field-level facilitators included efforts among leading library field organizations and systems to coordinate and integrate library data collection (Measures that Matter), other like-minded initiatives (e.g., Libraries Transforming Communities) and, potentially, a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding requirement to report on outcome data (or other field-level incentive).





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