

Notes from First Statistics Task Force Meeting
March 28, 2013

Present: Honore Bray, Stacy Bruhn, Wendy Campbell, Tracy Cook, Kim Crowley, Desiree Dramstad, Michelle Fenger, Sarah McHugh, Jodi Oberweiser

Welcome and Introductions: Sarah introduced the members of the task force, discussed the process, thanked people for serving, and encouraged people to give feedback on process. She then briefly outlined format of the meeting.

Goals: Sarah discussed the goals of the task force and encouraged members to give feedback. She also stated that the goals may shift or change as we work through the process.

Timeline: Sarah discussed the timeline and what we plan to cover at each meeting. Timeline is flexible. At this point action and recommendations will take place in June. Sarah emphasized that suggestions for federal definitions have to go through a lengthy process at the national level. Suggestions for data collected for the state can move more quickly, but task force needs to follow administrative rules which require at least 60 days' notice if a change in data collection is made. Sarah explained that this requirement does not apply to changes in state calculations to determine a value for a data element. New data collection would affect the FY2014 statistics collection process. Changes to calculations can be put in place for the FY2013 statistics collection process.

Stats. Overview: Stacy gave an overview of the process. IMLS mandates what is required and the timeline. State Data Coordinators are responsible for collecting data, but collection rate varies. Montana has 100% compliance because we require public libraries to file their stats in order to receive state aid.

MSL asks for data for a July-June fiscal year. We traditionally start collecting the data from September through November. This is done through the library directory. Once everything is received Stacy reviews the data and looks for large anomalies. In February IMLS sends Stacy the materials she needs to enter the data into the federal system. The system automatically begins looking for problems (called edit checks). Stacy follows up with librarians on the edit checks. A certain % of the problems must be resolved before Stacy can upload the information. This takes about 6 weeks.

Once the initial computerized check is completed a human from the federal level looks at the data and contacts Stacy with questions. MSL considers the process closed once we get to this point. Once closed the statistics on the MSL website are updated and the latest stats are available for use.

Certain statistics that we collect have federal definitions. These definitions are our box. State Data Coordinators (SDC's) must either stay within this box or make recommendations for changing the box. Each year the SDC's meet in December to discuss what to add, delete, and/or change within the data elements. A lot of the information and groundwork for these discussions happens before the conference. The SDC's not IMLS determine what is collected. After debating each element the State Data Coordinators vote on what data elements will be added, deleted, or changed. Census and IMSL together will make the recommended changes to the system, but it takes 1-2 years to finalize and the data must be collected for at least 4 years before IMLS says okay we are collecting this information.

There is a working group of SDC's that can work on data elements and recommend small changes. IMLS is trying to help states communicate data to legislators, use it for mapping or other tools. There is a lot more focus on leveraging the data that is available.

State Library Calculations are things we add up and calculate based on a different process. For example transactions are collected weekly at the state level, and then the State Library multiplies library figures by 52 in order to send an annual total to IMLS. Not every element we collect is sent to the feds, but a number of them show up in different elements we report. For example we asked for different kinds of capital revenue but IMLS says just report the total capital revenue.

State Data Coordinators do not want to overburden librarians, but it is a great idea to submit suggestions to them. In particular if we have some recommendations for electronic resources the feds would appreciate hearing our ideas. We should feel empowered to send our suggestions to the State Data Coordinators.

List of known problematic statistics: Tracy presented list and then asked members of the group if there was anything they wanted to delete or add. No deletions were suggested. Additions were staff, staff FTE, materials – print, electronic, and serials, computer use – include devices, revenue, and improving accuracy.

Assignments: Sarah said the next discussion topics were frequency of collecting, timing of collecting, and discussion of problematic statistics. She reminded the task force to wear two hats – their own individual hat as a library director and then the statewide task force hat.

Members were assigned the task of reviewing the list of problematic statistics and then identifying what makes them problematic and what recommendations members might have for improving these statistics. Tracy has been given the assignment of asking State Data Coordinators what is problematic at the national level. Sarah reminded members to consider survey burden when thinking about the frequency and timing of collection question—that we'll need to think about what is possible for all sizes of libraries

Final comments/wrap-up: Sarah asked if anyone had any questions. Kim asked what elements are being discussed by the State Data Coordinators. Stacy said electronic resources are getting a lot of discussion, summer reading programs, and the digital technology survey that was funded by Gates. This survey has been discontinued so SDC's discussed adding certain elements, but only a couple made it to the top of the list. For both this survey and the summer reading programs the feeling was that this data is collected elsewhere.

Tracy will prepare a list of elements that are being debated nationally. Sarah mentioned that the next meeting may be 2 hours long, because of the work needed to address the list of problematic statistics. We can break it up if need be. She will send out a doodle poll soon. Next meeting will be in late April or early May. Stacy mentioned that we will have a new staff person at MSL who has experience with data and will be able to add a lot to the process.