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Helping Libraries Change Lives

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The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) exists to strengthen museum and library service throughout the nation. Our awards support key activities and encourage leadership, innovation, and partnerships. In 2002, IMLS awarded more than \$149 million to state library administrative agencies. In return, we want to show compelling evidence of the benefits these funds help libraries create.

What's OBE and what's in it for you?

For IMLS, outcomes are peoples' skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, life conditions, or status -- improved reading, informed health decisions, attending school. Outcome-based planning chooses a few phenomena that can credibly represent a desirable condition ("read a bedtime story aloud at least three times a week," "apply five basic steps to solve computer problems") and builds a program to achieve them. Outcome-based evaluation (OBE) systematically collects information to show how many participants reached the program's goals.

IMLS began its OBE initiative in response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, but we quickly recognized the contribution it makes to management and communication. OBE helps institutions allocate resources wisely, design effective services, and monitor programs' success. It takes a good, hard look at goals and how they'll be met. It makes programs better.

Historically, libraries have focussed on productivity to document their value -- resources used, people served, services provided. Statistics are essential, but they only tell a piece of the story. If "libraries change lives," and we believe they do, we can use the results of library services to show the human meaning of library cards, Web hits, and summer reading statistics.

What's happening in OBE for State Library Agencies?

Starting with five volunteers in 1998 (FL, MD, MN, NC, and WA), IMLS has provided OBE workshops to 57 state library agencies, including DC and six freely-associated states and territories. Some states have already incorporated OBE into sub-grant activities. Others have invested in staff training and used OBE for internal decision-making. Since each state is developing models to fit local needs, programs vary significantly. In late 2002 IMLS will survey all of its OBE workshop participants to evaluate our own program. We will share results with the community.

IMLS has asked states to identify outcomes for self-selected programs in their new five-year LSTA plans and will provide technical assistance on request. Responding to increasing grantee demands, we have provided our staff with training for OBE technical assistance. Near the end of 2002 we will publish a suite of resources and tools for planning and evaluation.

Evidence of increasing interest in OBE comes from a number of directions. Professional meetings such as the Texas and Maryland Library Associations and the Public Library Association have sponsored OBE sessions. ALA's LAMA is offering an institute in OBE and PLA is planning an OBE publication. ALA recently published an *Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in Your Library*. Florida state library staff will present a session at the American Evaluation Society meeting in November 2002. All will be excellent sources.

IMLS encourages ASCLA members who are interested in developing OBE models or tools that meet the needs of state libraries to consider proposals to our National Leadership Grant program. Please contact Program Officers Jeanne McConnell or Martha Crawley for information, and see our web site at www.ims.gov for additional details. IMLS is always available to answer questions.

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