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Florida: A Commitment to Outcomes Evaluation

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In 1998, the Division of Library and Information Services for the State of Florida made a commitment to move to outcome evaluation for federally-funded projects, a key decision that has affected funding of library projects and much of the Divisions' focus and training. Congress had passed the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and during those hearings there were tough questions. Members of Congress wanted to know what kinds of impacts or outcomes resulted from these funds. The Division began working with a consultant who had provided outcome-based training for the United Way in Florida. Later that year Florida became one of the Institute of Museum and Library Services' five pilot states to develop outcome-based measures for LSTA funds. By 1999, the Division had redesigned their LSTA program to require all applications to utilize outcome evaluation.

During this redesign of the LSTA program, the Exemplary Program was established. Each year the Bureau of Library Development selects outstanding, "star-quality" projects funded by LSTA from among the many projects completed by Florida's libraries. The program is designed to highlight excellence in program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In 2001, Central Florida Library Cooperative's (CFLC) project, "Technology Training for Central Florida Libraries," was selected as one of the exemplary programs. This project provided training throughout the region either at existing training labs or through a "traveling lab" of laptops. The cooperative looked at the change in library staff's knowledge of technology and their increase in ability to serve library patrons. They surveyed participants, asking questions that got to the changes that occurred due to the training. Well over 80 percent of respondents indicated increase in knowledge of specific technology and ability to provide assistance to patrons.

This information got to the change in knowledge, skills, behavior, or condition of participants with little more effort than gathering information such as number of participants and comfort of the chairs.

Additional information about the exemplary program and the outcome based LSTA program in Florida is available at: <http://dliis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/grants/Lsta/LSTA.html>.

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