Evaluating the Success of LSTA Sub-Grant Projects
For Project Managers

As manager of an LSTA-funded project, you will submit a final report at the end of the project, which will include data about the grant-funded activities and your assessment of how effective the project was in producing the desired outcomes.

Your project may or may not actually succeed in changing people’s attitudes, behaviors and skills – many factors beyond the library’s control may affect a project’s success. But, it is important to collect information and create a record of grant funded activities, whether or not they were perceived to be successful.

Your initial grant application included a plan for evaluating the outcomes of project activities for participating individuals. As the project unfolds, you should refer often to that plan, change the plan if needed, and keep your own notes about how well the project activities fulfill expectations.

Costs associated with evaluating the success of a project can be included in the grant application budget.

Partners and staff should participate in evaluation of the project. Discuss the importance of evaluation with all project staff, including volunteers and partner agencies. Enlist their aid in collecting data, and gather their observations, too.

Evaluation steps must be incorporated in the ongoing project, not left until the end of the project.

Here are some ways of collecting data, documenting results, and gauging the overall success of a project:

- Conduct interviews with individuals participating in project activities; note their reactions and any changes in their attitudes toward library services (satisfaction, disappointment, enthusiasm, indifference, etc.)
- Observe and make notes while project activities are occurring, either as part of the action or as a bystander. Note activities that work well or that could be improved.
- Observe and make notes on the kinds of people that participated (age, race/ethnicity, employment condition, family details, etc. as appropriate to the project.)
- Bring together staff and audience members in focus groups to discuss the project’s successes and failures.
- Gather numbers and data: Count circulation, attendance, items utilized, number of hours devoted to the project, dollars spent or saved, etc.
- Compare pre-existing data with project information, and note any changes.
- Conduct surveys of participants. But, beware: Voluntary surveys are an easy option, but they rarely prove to be an effective way of collecting data about outcomes. Use surveys only to supplement other methods.
• Collect anecdotal reports and personal stories that come to light during or as a result of project activities.
• Document changes in the personal skills and knowledge (improved or not improved) of those who participated in project activities. Pre- and post-tests can be effective here.
• Select some participants and/or staff to self-report via logs and journals kept during the course of the project.
• Invite an outside expert to observe, review, and critique project activities.
• Analyze the cost/benefit aspects of your project.
• Conduct a “hot wash” staff discussion immediately after the close of the project to gather and record reactions while memories are still fresh (positive or negative).

**Compare the results** of various evaluation attempts. If data is contradictory, try to track down and resolve the problem before much additional time passes. Finally, review notes and data, and combine to **make a “story”** of the project that you can tell later on.

You may wish to **share the evaluation of your project** for the benefit of other libraries. The State Library posts information about selected LSTA projects on its website. You may also choose to:
• Present a report on your project at library staff gatherings such as State Library exchanges
• Present a session at SCLA, ARSL, or PLA
• Present information about your project and its outcomes as a Poster Session at one of these conferences
• Provide information to the State Library’s Communication Officer for the online newsfeed
• Write an article for a professional journal
• Create a page on your library’s web page or in your newsletter about the project
• Let the media know about your success via press releases before and after the project’s conclusion