

INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EVALUATION FOR IMPROVED PUBLIC LIBRARY DECISION MAKING AND ADVOCACY: ABSTRACT

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Public libraries are under increasing pressure to show value, impact, benefits, quality, and other uses of their resources and services to the local communities that they serve. Being able to articulate library impact, value, quality, and other benefits can enable librarians and managers to demonstrate what public libraries do for their communities along a number of important dimensions, such as literacy (traditional, information, and technology), economic, and social factors.

The need that this demonstration project addresses is: *How can "best practice" evaluation strategies support public librarians and managers demonstrate the value of their libraries to the communities that they serve?*

This demonstration project will provide public librarians and managers with an overview of leading evaluative approaches that are used and are useful in a public library setting; types of data each approach provides and how each data type helps describe specific library services, resources, and programs; strengths and weaknesses of each approach; success with which libraries have employed the different approaches; how situational factors within library settings affect the successful use and utility of these approaches; and ways in which to engage in and use various evaluation strategies, analyze evaluation data, interpret evaluation results, and present evaluation findings for advocacy and management purposes.

The primary product of this research will be a web-based Evaluation Decision Management System (EDMS) that public librarians, managers, and others can use to assist in selecting, using, and reporting/analyzing data from various evaluation approaches for advocacy purposes (see Figure 1). The EDMS will assist public librarians and managers to:

- 1) Identify available evaluation approaches;
- 2) Select evaluation approaches that might *best* meet their data needs, either library developed or imposed by external funders/organizations;
- 3) Develop an overall evaluation plan that makes effective and efficient use of limited library resources;
- 4) Implement an evaluation plan; and
- 5) Use the evaluation findings to advocate for local library support.

The EDMS builds on existing research supported by Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the State Library of Florida. The project will also produce a framework to improve overall evaluation efforts; reports that describe project activities and findings; and a number of workshops, seminars, and presentations held in selected cities to disseminate the findings from the study and introduce the library community to the EDMS developed as part of the study.

Ultimately, this demonstration project will provide sustained guidance to public libraries in understanding and selecting appropriate evaluative approaches; access to training modules on the types and uses of evaluative approaches which would be maintained in a centralized setting; strategies for developing specific approaches to evaluation within a public library setting; and access to a sustainable web-based source of information and tools on evaluation in a public library setting.

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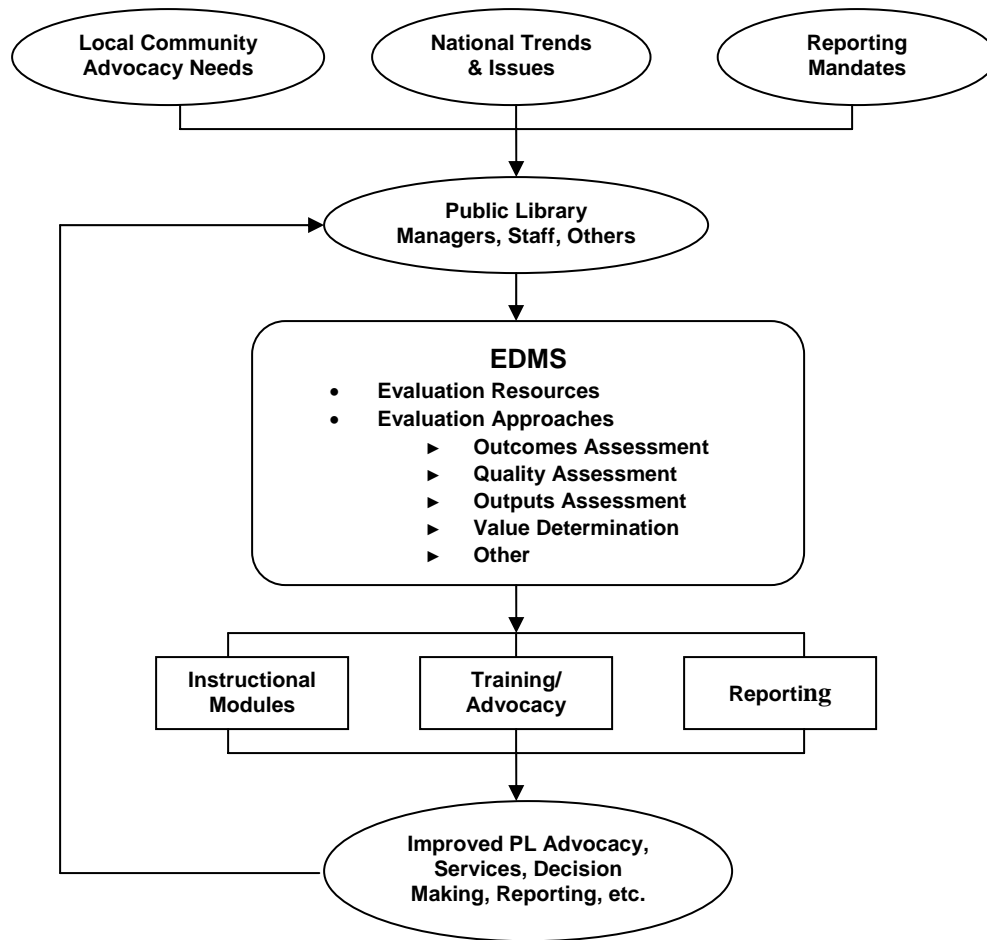


Figure 1. Overview of the Evaluation Decision Management System and Evaluation Context.