LIBRARIES AND E-GOVERNMENT: NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN PUBLIC SERVICE:

FIRST INTERIM REPORT OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES – DRAFT

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Charles R. McClure, PhD <cmcclure@lis.fsu.edu>
Director, Information Institute and Francis Eppes Professor

Jeff D. Saunders, <jds10g@my.fsu.edu>
Research Associate, Information Institute

Lauren H. Mandel, <lmandel@fsu.edu>
Research Coordinator, Information Institute

For

Jessica McGilvray
American Library Association
Washington Office
1615 New Hampshire Avenue, First Floor
Washington, D.C. 20009-2520

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The overall purpose of the *Libraries and E-Government: New Partnerships in Public Service* project is to develop a Web resource to help libraries better assist their users successfully engage in e-government activities. The main issue in achieving this goal is the ability of libraries and government agencies to work together effectively in the provision of e-government services to residents and communities across the country. Specifically, the project focuses on the content areas of immigration and taxation to develop the Web resource. Support from the Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Government Printing Office, four state library agencies (Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, and Texas), and several public and academic libraries (the latter through the Government Information Online community) provides the resources to explore how best to bring governments and libraries together to provide best practices and quality e-government services to users for the successful access, use, and interaction with government agencies and their e-government services and resources. The primary benefit of the Web resource is the enumeration of best practices and content that will help eliminate redundant efforts in libraries, produce savings in costs and staff time, and increase access for users.

As part of this project, the Information Use Management and Policy Institute (Information Institute)[1] at Florida State University,[2] College of Communication and Information,[3] School of Library and Information Studies[4] has a subcontract from the American Library Association[5] to perform three main tasks. These tasks are the following:

- To conduct background research to assist in the development and specification of public library e-government service roles;
- To conduct iterative usability testing of the project's e-government website; and
- To conduct formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and outcomes assessment for the entire project.

To date, the Information Institute has conducted a number of activities in fulfillment of Task 1. These activities include:

- Review of recent e-government literature, websites, and projects to insure that the project team is current with recent trends and developments;
- Developing interview and focus group questionnaires in conjunction with Dr. John Carlo Bertot at the University of Maryland[6] Information Policy and Access Center[7] (formerly

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[1] http://ii.fsu.edu/
[2] http://www.fsu.edu
[3] http://cci.fsu.edu
[4] http://slis.fsu.edu
[5] http://www.ala.org
[6] http:///www.umd.edu
[7] http://ipac.umd.edu/

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the Center for Library and Information Innovation[8] and the Center for Information Policy and E-Government[9]) to assist in the development and specification of public library e-government service roles from professional librarians, government officials, and other knowledgeable individuals working as public officials in an administrative or information provision service capacity;

- Conducting interviews at the Florida Library Association (FLA) Annual Conference in May 2011[10] or follow-up/substitute phone interviews or email responses; and
- Reviewing all e-government grant projects in the state of Florida funded from the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) that were awarded in the current fiscal year (2010).

Additional detail on these activities follows.

Task 1: Review of E-Government Literature and Trends.

To remain current in trends and developing issues in e-government service roles, Dr. McClure reviewed selected websites and recent literature related to e-government. The website review focused on resources relating to tax, immigration, and employment services. The reviewed literature identified the need for greater coordination between public libraries and government agencies, as well as current trends in e-government service roles.

Task 2: Conduct Background Research to Assist in the Development and Specification of Public Library E-Government Service Roles

Activity 1: Development of Interview Questionnaire

The interview questions developed by the Information Institute project team and Dr. Bertot focused primarily on ascertaining the following:

- Which services public libraries offer users for filing taxes;
- How those tax preparation services reach the general public;
- What, if any, improvements could be made to better serve local communities' tax preparation needs;
- Which services public libraries offer for immigrants, such as citizenships tests, special collections in different languages, and special relationships with consulates or other partnerships with community organizations;
- Whether or not librarians have helped in filling in government forms, employment applications, or other e-government related resources and services; and
- Whether or not librarians feel that additional training is needed to help meet users' e-government needs.

The interview questions are available in Appendix A.

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[8] http://clii.umd.edu/
[9] http://www.cipeg.umd.edu/index.html
[10] http://www.flalib.org/conference_2011.php

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Activity 2: Interviews

Dr. McClure conducted initial interviews at the 2011 FLA Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida and supplemental phone and email interviews. Despite poor response, some initial data were gathered that provide valuable information to develop and specify public library e-government service roles and which issues or barriers there are for public libraries to fulfill those service roles. A key theme emergent from these interviews is that the fundamental barrier to public libraries providing e-government services is lack of funding.

All state government agencies in Florida currently are coping with large budget cuts and are looking for cheap ways to provide public access to services. Public libraries provide tantalizingly cheap "scaffolding" for these agencies to utilize without any additional cost to themselves. State agencies were not mandated to develop actual partnerships with public libraries or to reach more families, just to cut costs and decrease the number of full time employees. This resulted in the public libraries receiving additional responsibilities without any additional financial or other support. With the continued economic recession, there are an increasing number of applicants for government services that must be applied for online, and many of the people who really need these services only have access to the Internet through their local public library. At the same time, public libraries themselves are dealing with budget cuts and staff reductions, which limit their ability to meet users' e-government needs.

From the initial interviews and supplemental phone and email interviews it is evident that there needs to be a clear partnership among the various government agencies and public libraries. Some kind of support is required for public libraries to effectively provide e-government services to users. Interviewees' suggestions of what this support might entail include the idea of increasing E-Rate money to public libraries that are involved in the delivery of e-government services. Another suggestion is for there to be a mechanism of payment from the respective government agencies for each e-government application filed from the public library; for example, if each e-government application filed from the public library received a stipend (not a large stipend, maybe $10 or $20), then the library could budget effectively for a dedicated e-government staff member

Most of those interviewed did not perceive e-government services as a priority concern, given the fact that many librarians are more concerned about keeping their libraries open in the current economic climate. Many did not understand how the ALA website would differ from USA.gov, the current portal for federal e-government. The general feeling seems to be that USA.gov is adequate for current needs, and another website may not provide that great of a benefit. There are questions about who is going to maintain and update the website, whether that is going to be the responsibility of ALA or some other organization. Also, most interviewees were confused as to the audience the website is supposed to target. Since currently it is unclear if the website is going to be for users of e-government services or an information source about e-government sources for librarians.

As Dr. McClure was unable to answer these and other website format questions, most of the interviewees could not really provide comments or opinions. Some expressed a willingness to participate once there are more tangible products to review. Most agreed that the primary

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services need to be for taxation and immigration. However, information on foreclosure help, policies, and procedures also was identified as an equivalent concern. This highlights the fact that situational factors play a key role in determining what e-government services a community most needs, as the downturn in the real estate market has hit Florida particularly hard. Interviewees also identified the need for a major marketing campaign to explain both the purpose of the ALA website and its difference from current e-government sites like USA.gov. This is critical as some of the interviewees did not express much interest in having to learn and help develop a new e-government site.

Activity 3: Review of Current E-Government-Related Projects in Florida

There are currently only five e-government-related projects funded through LSTA money in the state of Florida. Of these five, the two most extensive, non-statewide projects, are the Training Project for the New River Public Library Cooperative (NRPLC) and the Pasco County Public Library Cooperative (PCLC) E-Government Initiative Year 4. Statewide and other projects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: LSTA Funded E-Government Related Projects in the State of Florida

Project Name	Organization Name	Service Population	Service Area	Project Information/Background
Training, Part Three[11]	New River Public Library Cooperative	63,285	Baker, Bradford, and Union Counties	Part Three of this project focuses on providing hands on computer use training and one-on-one assistance for residents.
Pasco County E-Government Initiative Year 4[12]	Pasco County Public Library Cooperative	471,028	Pasco County	Year 4 of this project includes outreach services and technology training for residents of Pasco County.
Expanding Library Services for Access to Information[13]	Division of Library and Information Services	450,000	Statewide	Focuses on broadening and coordinating individual libraries e-government websites and providing technical assistance to libraries.
Recruitment and Leadership Development	Division of Library and Information Services	20,000	Statewide	These funds support the Florida Library Jobs website, Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute, Annual Public Library Directors' Meeting, New Public Library Directors Orientation, and the Leadership Laboratory.

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[11] http://www.newriver.lib.fl.us/government/e-government/
[12] http://pascolibraries.org/egovtools.shtml
[13] http://www.egovflorida.org/

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Table 1: LSTA Funded E-Government Related Projects in the State of Florida continued

Project Name	Organization Name	Service Population	Service Area	Project Information/Background
Career Catalyst	West Palm Beach Public Library	11,360	City of West Palm Beach	Developed primarily for helping users find employment and bolster employability through better computer skills.

Originally awarded in 2009, the NRPLC project is now in its third year. Year one saw the hiring of a teacher, development of classes, and purchase of equipment. The NRPLC service area comprises three counties and approximately 1,138 square miles, so the primary focus of the project is outreach to the various county residents with a mobile lab. Year two saw some revisions to the computer literacy course, such as adding an advanced computer course. Year three (the current year) expands the computer literacy class to provide instruction on resume writing, GED practice and career test preparation, as well as updating NRPLC's e-government website.

PCLC's project originally was granted to develop a statewide e-government portal. Now in Year 4 of the project, PCPC will continue to maintain and update the website in addition to providing technology training to residents at outreach locations. An added focus is to develop partnerships with local small businesses and job seekers to encourage job creation.

Next Steps

The next step for this project is for the Information Institute project team to attend the project meeting to be held at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is anticipated that additional and more specific next steps and tasks will come out of that meeting. Tentatively, the Information Institute anticipates that next steps will include conducting interviews with information professionals regarding preliminary website designs and conducting iterative usability testing of the project's e-government website.

Summary

Preliminary data from a small, but knowledgeable sample of interviews, suggest a confusion of purpose over the project's aim and scope. Many interviewees are unsure of the benefits and usefulness of such a site. This is indicative of a general lack of coordination of e-government web resources. In the state of Florida alone, there are overlapping e-government web services that are underutilized. It is clear that a marketing campaign will be needed to inform the professional community of both the existence and purpose of this new website. Also evident from the preliminary interviews is the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. For example, residents in Florida would need more services and information about foreclosures than residents in states less affected by the downturn in the real estate market. Interviewed information professionals also indicated a willingness to provide greater amounts of feedback once the project team develops something tangible to review.

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APPENDIX A:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory Statement

We are working with ALA and the University of Maryland to develop a web resource to help librarians meet their community e-government needs. In particular, the University of Maryland's Center for Library & Information Innovation will develop the resource that focuses initially on taxation and Immigration, having partnerships with the IRS and USCIS. The goal is to assist libraries initially provide immigration and taxation services to their communities, and then expand to other e-government services and resources. The project is funded by IMLS and runs through August 2013.

Questions

1. Can you please describe immigration or taxation services that you provide at your library?

    a. Taxation:
        i. Is your library a VITA site?
        ii. Do you help people obtain ITIN numbers so that they can file taxes?
        iii. Does you library partner with other community organizations to help people file their taxes?
        iv. Other? Examples?
        v. If you could ask the IRS for help, what would help your library better meet the taxation needs of your communities?

    b. Immigration:
        i. Please describe what roles, if any, your library plays in meeting the needs of immigrants?
            1. ESL classes
            2. Talk time sessions
            3. Special collections for language, other
            4. InfoPass
            5. Citizenship tests
            6. Dedicated computers?
        ii. Does you library partner with other community organizations to help people achieve citizenship or meet other immigration needs?
        iii. Do you have relations with any consulates or other international representatives to help particular immigrant populations?
            1. If so, what are these relationships?
        iv. Other? Examples?
        v. Is your library a Passport Center?
        vi. If you could ask USCIS for help, what would help your library better meet the immigration needs of your communities?

2. What are some additional e-government service roles performed at your library?

   a. Have you accessed and assisted users with navigating e-government web sites?
      i. If so, how often?
      ii. Can you provide some examples of this?

3. Have you assisted users in filling in forms and sending e-mails related to obtaining forms?

   a. If so, how often?
   b. Can you provide some examples of this?

4. Have you helped writing employment letters and resumes, completing employment and unemployment applications, and searching employment databases with users?

   a. If so, how often?
   b. Can you provide some examples of this?

5. Have you assisted users in locating government information such as hunting and fishing licenses, government assistance and grants, Medicare benefits, immigration and naturalization regulations, tax forms, vital statistics, and so forth?

   a. If so, how often?
   b. Can you provide some examples of this?

6. Can you think of other e-government services and resources you assist users with that are not listed in previous questions?

7. In total, how many hours a week would you estimate are devoted to assisting users with e-government related resources and services?

8. Would you benefit from training?

9. Would you benefit from using a web portal for e-government in the U.S.?

10. Do you refer users to other organizations and agencies?