Project Title:	Assessing Quality in Digital Reference Services in Florida Public Libraries
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The project team conducted two site visits at Florida Public Libraries in August 2001. The objectives of these visits were to:

- Document how digital reference services were being planned for, delivered, and evaluated in libraries.
- Understand how "quality" in digital reference is defined in these environments.
- Identify current issues in the provision of digital reference surrounding technology, management, staffing and training, and costing and economic concerns.
- Determine the evaluation needs of libraries vis-à-vis digital reference services.

Data were collected in in-depth interviews with key informants at each library. In addition to the pre-formatted questions, interviews included opportunities for respondents to raise issues and add topics to the agenda. In the course of these interviews several trends and issues were documented that are developing as a common thread in the academic literature and in data gathered on site visits at libraries across the United States. These trends include:

- Many digital reference services have grown organically out of the library's perceived need to provide digital reference service and not as the result of detailed planning;
- The volume of digital reference questions is generally low, but can be increased with outreach efforts and increased visibility offered by advertising and formal marketing efforts;
- The low volume of questions has kept the need to address many management, staffing, and training issues at bay. If these services are expanded, these issues will come into focus and formal policy, procedure, and evaluation strategies will be needed to support them;
- Libraries continue to be concerned about the need to provide reference services 24 hour a day, seven days a week. It is valid to question whether this service is necessary for every library type and whether the library's designated user group or service area will in fact benefit from it;
- Many predict future movement toward increased accountability in providing costing data on a program basis. To do this, libraries will need to develop new ways of apportioning costs and benefits if digital reference services are to be accurately described;
- Efforts at evaluating digital reference services have been limited and rudimentary. Emphasis has been on volume statistics and the need to measure user satisfaction. Evaluation plans need to be formalized and new metrics and measures developed to allow for the appropriate evaluation of digital reference services in libraries.

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