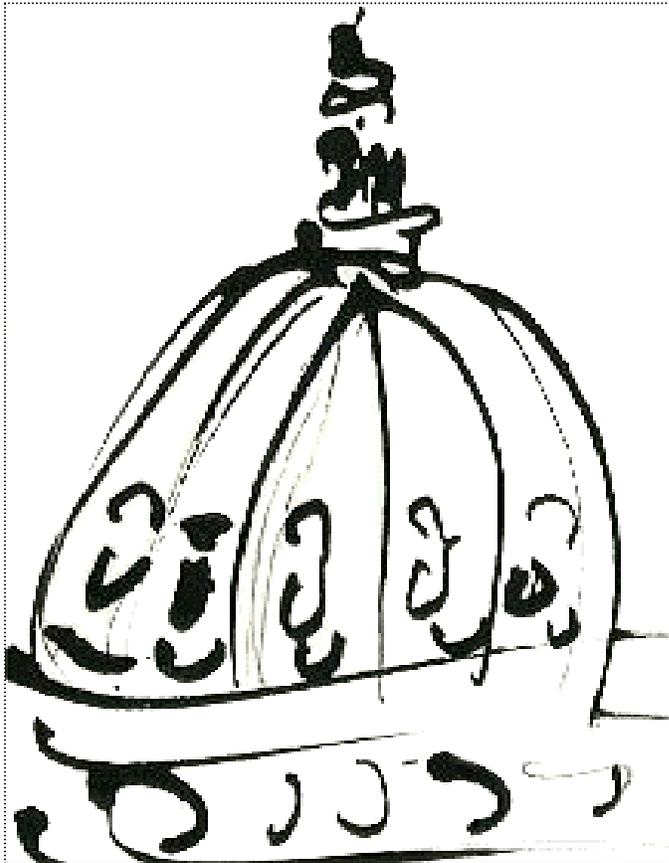




Information Use Management and Policy Institute
College of Information, Florida State University



Public Libraries and the Internet 2006: Study Results and Findings

John Carlo Bertot, Ph. D.
Associate Director and Professor

Charles R. McClure, Ph. D.
Director and Francis Eppes Professor

Paul T. Jaeger, Ph.D. and J. D.
Assistant Professor

Joe Ryan
Senior Research Associate

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APPENDIX 3: CASE STUDY APPROACH AND METHOD

Introduction

An overview of the study approach includes the following elements:

- **Secure funding:** These case studies are part of the 2006 *Public libraries and the Internet*⁴³ study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation;⁴⁴
- **Research questions:** Define the exploratory study's initial research questions;
- **Study populations and site selection:** Identify the study populations and select state and individual library participants then schedule visits;
- **Methods and study instruments:** Decide on methods to be employed and develop study instruments;
- **Site visits:** Conduct site visits. A summary of each site's visit reviewed by key participant at each site. Case summaries and analysis done after each state's visits so that prior results may inform next state's interviews.
- **Follow up data collection:** Data from site visits prompted the need for additional data collection via telephone and e-mail interviews.
- **Data analysis:** Data analysis is done across all the states and sites visited.
- **Final report:** Draft and review of final report.

The general approach employed by the researcher was an iterative learning strategy. The researcher sequenced individual data collection events and their analysis such that findings from one activity could be incorporated into subsequent data collection and analysis events. This iterative learning approach allowed the researcher to modify, adapt, and refine their data collection and analysis activities as he continued data collection activities.

Study Population & Site Selection

The study team defined two populations: state libraries and successfully networked public libraries. The principal criteria used to select the states and public libraries visited were:

- **Geographic diversity:** Effort will be made to select states from different parts of the country;
- **Size:** Effort will be made to select both small and large states and small and large public libraries;
- **Willingness to participate:** The study will make moderate demands on the state and public libraries involved in terms of time and staff commitment. The states and public libraries chosen have to be willing to participate and assist in site visit logistics;
- **Study team familiarity with state and public libraries:** The researchers chose states with which the study team had recent state and public library experience. This was deemed a factor due to the limited time the study team could spend in each state;
- **Local expert advice:** Where possible, the advice of the project advisory committee, state library managers and knowledgeable local public library managers will be sought regarding selection of public library participants;

⁴³ *Public libraries and the Internet* studies <<http://www.ii.fsu.edu/plinternet.cfm>>.

⁴⁴ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation <<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Libraries/>>.

- **Funding and logistics limitations:** The study has limited funding to conduct the study and certain logistical constraints.

The study team applied a two step process in order to select sites for this study: identify states to visit and then identify successfully networked public libraries within the state.

The state library population consisted of the state librarian and knowledgeable members of the state library development team. The state library development unit has the best overview understanding of public libraries within the state. This unit frequently visits public libraries, provides training and assistance to them, and obtains various data from them. This unit is the most knowledgeable within the state regarding public libraries and their development including library networks, computing, Internet use, integrated library systems, subscription database use, web site design and development. Funding and logistics limited the number of states visited to five. The states selected were Texas, Iowa, New Jersey, Oregon and Florida (in the order they were visited).

The second defined population was the successfully networked public libraries or systems within the states' selected. This group consisted of the public library or system director and relevant library staff. Successfully networked public libraries within a state were chosen in consultation with state library staff. The state library staff was given a verbal and written description of the site selection criteria for the public libraries the study team wished to visit. The state library staff at each state had no difficulty identifying potential sites. The state librarian (or designate) then assisted the study team by making initial contacts and with logistics.

Study Instruments

A one page description of the study was prepared for use with State Library participants, see Appendix 3-A. The web site at each public library visited was examined prior to its site visit. Each site visit was preceded by an e-mail outlining the types of research questions to be asked during the site visit. See Appendix 3-B for a sample pre site visit note. Each site visit began with a tour of the facility and general introduction to the library. In-person group and individual interviews were conducted as arranged by the library director⁴⁵ at each site visited. A general script containing research questions asked at each site visit was prepared prior to each visit. See Appendix 3-C for a public library interview script. Additional follow up interviews were conducted after each site visit as needed.

Site Visits

A typical site visit lasted a half day to a full day depending largely on logistics. The visit began with a tour of the public library (and branches where possible). Then the visit continued with individual and group interviews scheduled by the library director. Documentation regarding the library, statistics, planning and services was collected as available. A summary of the data collected was reviewed by a site visit participant for factual accuracy and as an

⁴⁵ The State Librarian selected staff to be interviewed at the State Library site visits.

opportunity to collect additional data. Subsequent e-mail or phone follow-up interviews were conducted as needed.

Project Schedule & Tasking

The study began October 2005 and was completed in June 2006. Project logistics, site visits and interviews will be coordinated and conducted by Joe Ryan. Table 3-1 summarizes key project tasks and schedule. SNPL project documents, including site visit reports and the final report, will be available on the Florida State University, School of Information Studies, Information Use Management and Policy web site <<http://www.ii.fsu.edu/>>.

Table 3-1. Key Project Tasks and Schedule	
Timetable	Task
October 2005-December 2005	Project planning and logistics including identification of study objectives, population. Identification of states and public library participants.
December 2005	Scheduling site visits. Conduct of preliminary phone interviews.
January 23 week 2006	Conduct Texas site visits
January 30 week 2006	Conduct Iowa site visits
February 13 week 2006	Conduct New Jersey site visits
March 27 week 2006	Conduct Oregon site visits
April 3-13 2006	Conduct Florida site visits
April-May 2006	Interview analysis, report generation and review
June 30	Draft report

Efforts to Ensure Data Quality

Field evaluation is an art requiring quick assessment of opportunities and dangers to data quality on site. As Schatzman & Strauss (1973, p. vii) note:

...much of the research process consists of dealing with a flow of substantive discoveries and with field contingencies that variously modify the research; therefore the researcher is constantly attentive to options which are circumstantially presented to him, or which are created by him. Thus the field researcher is depicted as a *strategist*; for without linear-specific design - the researcher must develop procedure as he goes.

But field research is also a science, involving the systematic effort to reduce error due to researcher bias, incomplete or inaccurate data, and a host of other causes.

The study team will take a number of steps to reduce the threats to data quality in the present evaluation, both during data collection and later during analysis (as suggested by Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; and Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) including:

- Pre-structured research questions and interview instruments, pre-planned fieldwork, and where possible pre-planned final report.

- Standard, well-regarded methods familiar to the evaluators and appropriate to the setting (McClure, Ryan & Bertot, 2002). Primary methods were qualitative (Miles & Huberman, 1994) including the use of documentary evidence, interviews (Spadley, 1979), focus groups (Kruger & Casey, 2000 and Morgan, 1988) and preparation of case studies (Stake, 1994 and Yin, 1994).
- Fully documented research design decisions in writing and in discussions among the study team.
- Respond flexibly to the new and unexpected opportunities the data offer.
- Document fully the data collected. Evaluators conducted follow-up interviews where necessary.
- Triangulated the data collected and used mixed methods.
- Pre-structured data analysis and reporting as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Each of the above and other efforts increase the validity and reliability of the evaluation findings and provided a firm basis for making recommendations.

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