Public Libraries in the United States (PLS) Data Collection

Supporting Statement for PRA Submission

B	Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

B.1.   Respondent Universe

The PLS is a universe survey of public libraries that are identified by state library administrative agencies (SLAAs) in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the outlying areas. The survey frame consists of 9,291 public libraries – 9,233 public libraries in the 50 states and the District of Columbia and 58 public libraries in the outlying areas of Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands – as identified by state library administrative agencies (SLAA). A total of 9,085 of the 9,291 public libraries in the survey frame responded to the FY 2011 PLS (including Guam and Puerto Rico), for a unit response rate of 97.8 percent. Respondents to the survey are defined as public libraries for which data were reported on population of the legal service area and at least three of the following five items: total paid employees, total operating revenue, total operating expenditures, print materials, and total circulation. Some individual survey items, such as population of legal service area, service outlets, and type of legal basis, have a 100.0 percent response rate for their state because the state library agency provided these data for all public libraries in their state.

State library agencies collect the data from their local public libraries, and state data coordinators employed by the agencies report the data to IMLS via the Web application by the Census Bureau. All 50 states, the District of Columbia (including Guam, and Puerto Rico) participated in the FY2011 PLS.

B.2.   Procedures for the Collection of Information

Preparation for and administration of the collection will include annual reviews of the survey instrument; annual reviews of data elements, edit-checks, and post-collection processing; updates to the web application tool for data collection; contacting the chief officers of the SLAAs and the designated State Data Coordinators; opening the web application for respondents during the data collection field period; post-collection editing and imputation of the data file; and release of the data file, data documentation, and report of the findings.

B.2.1. Data Collection

Programming the Web Application
The PLS data are collected over the Internet via a computer self-administered questionnaire, called WebPLUS to allow for the collection and analyses of high quality and timely policy-relevant data on the current status of public libraries that enables an ongoing evaluation of trend comparisons. The WebPLUS tool is a database-driven Web portal specifically designed to integrate extant data into the data collection tool while incorporating information, user assistance, data validation, and reporting seamlessly into one site. The online administration was designed to minimize user technology requirements for both hardware and software, and as such, the PLS web tool can be accessed via personal computers or laptops. All that is needed to access the survey tool is Internet access to any commonly used Web browser, including Microsoft Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, and Google Chrome.

The web application is designed to minimize response burden, to enable timely submissions of high quality data, and to require minimal or no edit follow-up for data problems. A user guide is included in the web survey application. An edit check tool alerts the respondent to questionable data during the data entry process, via on-screen edit-check warnings and an edit check report that can be viewed on-screen or printed. These tools ease the completion of the survey and enable the review and submission of the data in a timely fashion. In addition, the survey is transmitted with prior-year data pre-entered into the system for items that are not expected to change annually, such as address and governing structure. The respondent is instructed to review the pre-entered data and update any information that has changed from the previous year. All other data fields are left blank for the respondent to fill in.

The web-based reporting system is updated and maintained by Census, the primary administrator of the data collection. IMLS and Census share responsibility for testing the product prior to its official release. The web application's operation is reviewed on an on-going basis, and updates and improvements to the application are made as needed.

Contacting Respondents
The official request for data collection will be e-mailed to the chief officers of SLAAs (COSLA) and stresses the importance of their participation in the survey, as partners in the process. The State data coordinators (SDCs) receive a separate e-mail that recognizes their primary responsibility for completion of the survey and encourages their response. The e-mail to the SDCs will also contain information for logging into the web application.

Techniques to Enhance Response

As the end of the data collection period approaches, Census contacts non-respondents to encourage their completion of the survey. Members of the IMLS staff also contact the Chief Officer of the relevant States' library administrative agencies if necessary, to encourage response. SDCs have peer mentors, selected by the SDCs. Library Statistics Working Group (LSWG) members are available to serve as mentors and may provide technical assistance to states in reporting their data. Census conducts edit follow-up of the data submissions and tries to obtain any data not reported in the original submission in order to maximize accuracy and response rate.

B.2.2. Statistical Methods

This is a universe survey and does not require special considerations for statistical methods.

Imputation
In order to make complete PLS datasets for constructing estimates of totals, it is sometimes necessary to impute for missing data items. After the data have been collected, edited, and cleaned, remaining missing items will be imputed. The data are identified as either imputed or reported on the survey data file through the use of imputation flags and data users are given definitions of what each flag means. Imputation methodologies that are commonly implemented for the PLS data: Zero Rule, Growth Rule, Sum Rule, Raking Procedure, Sum of Internal-detail Reported, and Regression Modeling.

B.3. Methods to Maximize Response Rate and Deal with Non-Response

B.3.1. Methods to Maximize Response Rates

The PLS has achieved a unit response rate by local public libraries of at least 96 percent since 1989. To maximize response rate and reduce respondent burden, the PLS was developed as an electronic data collection instrument. The web survey application includes a universe maintenance function, data editing/edit report tool, table generator, and user guide. These features were designed to provide maximum assistance to the respondent in completing the survey, to improve data quality, data timeliness, and to minimize edit follow-up for data problems.

To further reduce response burden, the survey contains pre-entered prior-year data for items that are not expected to change annually—about 35 percent of the survey items. The respondent is requested to review the pre-entered data and update it, if necessary.

In 2013, IMLS anticipates hosting a conference to train all of the state data coordinators on the functions and use of the survey application. IMLS and the Census Bureau also would offer technical assistance to states that have new State Data Coordinators and those having difficulty in submitting their data due to staff shortages or other reasons. Staggered survey due dates were established to enable state data to be submitted closer to the end of the state fiscal cycle. This results in timelier data submissions and enhances the flow of data processing at the state and federal levels. The Library Statistics Working Group (LSWG) members serve as mentors to other state data coordinators. States with low item response rates are identified during the edit follow-up process and encouraged to improve their response rates.

B.3.2. Statistical Approaches to Non-response

Historically, issues of non-response have not been a problem with the PLS. The survey is the result of a cooperative effort between the States and IMLS. This cooperative effort has led to the high response rate this survey has historically achieved.

B.4.   Tests to Minimize Burden and to Improve Utility

The Census Bureau developed the web application. The Census Bureau is responsible for the web application's testing and maintenance, with technical assistance and review performed by IMLS. The survey application would be tested by Census Bureau and IMLS staff members.

The PLS definitions are reviewed on an ongoing basis by individuals on the LSWG and revised when necessary to improve data quality. Survey items may be added, changed or discontinued due to changing importance or poor data quality. Evaluations of the validity and reliability of selected data are made periodically, including recommendations for improving the data collection.

B.5.   Individuals Responsible for Study Design and Performance

The following individuals are responsible for the study design and the collection and analysis of the data on PLS.

Personnel Involved with PLS

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