

Justification for Change to FY 2020 Public Libraries Survey (OMB# 3137-0074)

The Public Libraries Survey (PLS) collects annual descriptive data on the universe of public libraries in the United States and the Outlying Areas. It has been conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, pursuant to P.L. 107-279, under the clearance number 3137-0074, which expires 11/30/2022. Information such as public service hours per year, circulation of library books, number of librarians, population of legal service area, expenditures for library collection, programs for children and young adults, staff salary data, access to technology, etc., is collected from the State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAA) of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five Outlying Areas.

This request pertains to the 33rd cycle in the PLS series, conducted following the close of the 2020 fiscal year. Data collection will take place from January 2021 through early August 2021. This request includes two sets of revisions to the survey instrument that was approved by OMB in November 2019:

1. The addition of 15 items pertaining to widespread changes to public library services in response to the national reaction to the COVID-19 virus outbreak
2. Changes approved by Chief Officers of SLAAs and the State Data Coordinators who respond to the survey: two items removed, two items added, and one item revised.

This request does not introduce significant changes to the estimated respondent burden or the costs to the federal government. The following table summarizes the items that were removed, added, or revised in the PLS instrument. See Attachment 1 for the instrument item wording and detailed rationale for each change.

Item Number	Item Variable Name	Item Description	Change Removed (X), Added (A), Revised (R)	Rationale Summary
460	SUBSCRIP	Current Print Serial Subscriptions	X	State-approved item change
500	HRS_OPEN	Public Service Hours Open Per Year	X	State-approved item change
501a	VISITRPT	Library Visits Reporting Method	A	State-approved item change
502	REFERENC	Reference Transactions	R	State-approved item change
502a	REFERRPT	Reference Transactions Reporting Method	A	State-approved item change
510	C19CLOSE	Closed Outlets Due to COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
511	C19PUBSV	Public Services During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
512	C19ELMAT	Electronic Materials Added Due to COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
513	C19ECD1	Electronic Library Cards Issued Before COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
514	C19ECD2	Electronic Library Cards Issued During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
515	C19REFER	Reference Service During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
516	C19CURBS	Curbside Service During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
517	C19LIVEP	Live Virtual Programs During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19

Item Number	Item Variable Name	Item Description	Change Removed (X), Added (A), Revised (R)	Rationale Summary
518	C19RECDP	Recordings of Program Content During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
519	C19XWIF1	External WiFi Access Before COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
520	C19XWIF2	External WiFi Access During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
521	C19XWIF3	External WiFi Access Increase COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
522	C19STOTH	Staff Re-Assigned During COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
715	C19WKSCL	Number of Weeks an Outlet Closed Due to COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19
716	C19WKSLO	Number of Weeks an Outlet Had Limited Occupancy Due to COVID-19	A	Added to capture impact of COVID-19

Attachment 1

Modifications to Public Libraries Survey Instrument for FY 2020 Collection

(A) Removed – Two items collected annually at the Administrative Entity (AE) level were removed from the instrument:

- (1) SUBSCRIP (Item 460), Current Print Serial Subscriptions**, was removed because it is no longer relevant at the national level due to declining use of physical materials and the increasing use of electronic materials.
- (2) HRS_OPEN (Item 500), Public Service Hours per Year**, was removed because it is a sum of the values of subordinate outlet records (which will still be collected); reporting burden will be reduced by eliminating the reporting of the total because respondents will not have to reconcile discrepancies between the reported total and the calculated sum. (The instrument will calculate the value for this variable and store it in the survey data.)

(B) Revised – The item REFERENC was updated for clarity, separating the definition of a Reference Transaction from the notes and supplementary information related to reporting the number of Reference Transactions. (Changes to the item are in red font.)

Item 502

REFERENC

Reference Transactions

Reference Transactions are information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs.

Reference transactions do not include formal instruction or exchanges that provide assistance with locations, schedules, equipment, supplies, or policy statements.

NOTES:

1. A reference transaction includes information and referral service, unscheduled individual instruction and assistance in using information sources (including websites and computer-assisted instruction).
2. Count Readers Advisory questions as reference transactions.
3. Information sources include (a) printed and nonprinted material; (b) machine-readable databases (including computer-assisted instruction); (c) the library's own catalogs and other holdings records; (d) other libraries and institutions through communication or referral; and (e) persons both inside and outside the library.
4. When a staff member uses information gained from previous use of information sources to answer a question, the transaction is reported as a reference transaction even if the source is not consulted again.
5. If a contact includes both reference and directional services, it should be reported as one reference transaction.

6. Duration should not be an element in determining whether a transaction is a reference transaction.
7. Do not include transactions that include only a directional service, such as instruction for locating staff, library users, or physical features within the library. Examples of directional transactions include, “Where is the reference librarian? Where is Susan Smith? Where is the rest room? Where are the 600s? Can you help me make a photocopy?”

Annual Count vs. Annual Estimate

If an annual count of reference transactions is unavailable, count reference transactions during a typical week or weeks, and multiply the count to represent an annual estimate.

A “typical week” is a time that is neither unusually busy nor unusually slow. Avoid holiday times, vacation periods for key staff, or days when unusual events are taking place in the community or in the library. Choose a week in which the library is open its regular hours.

Example: If there are four weeks sampled, multiply the totals for those four weeks by 13 to get an estimate for the full year. If the sample is done twice a year (one week at each time, two weeks total) multiply the count by 26 to get the estimated annual count.

(C)Added – Two items were added to capture the methodological context of two existing items. Both VISITS (item 501) and REFERENC (item 502) allow the option to report an actual annual count or an estimated annual count based on actual counts during a typical week or weeks. These new items will provide a way for data users to make more precise comparisons and will not change current reporting. Also, these new items will enable IMLS to assess patterns in how these items are collected and identify ways to improve data quality and reduce reporting burden of the parent items.

(1) Item 501a

VISITRPT

Library Visits Reporting Method

Regarding the number of library visits entered (data element 501), is this an annual count or an annual estimate based on a typical week or weeks?

Select one of the following:

CT—Annual Count

ES—Annual Estimate Based on Typical Week(s)

(2) Item 502a

REFERRPT

Reference Transactions Reporting Method

Regarding the number of reference transactions entered (data element 502), is this an annual count or an annual estimate based on a typical week or weeks?

Select one of the following:

CT—Annual Count

ES—Annual Estimate Based on Typical Week(s)

(D) Added – Fifteen items were added to capture widespread changes to public library services in response to the national reaction to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. Most states are planning to add items to their state-level instruments to measure how libraries adapted their services to the public during the pandemic, so specifying a common set of items at the national level will enable the collection of higher quality data. Items 510-522 will be collected at the AE level and items 715 and 716 will be collected at the outlet (branch) level. Any additional reporting burden from these items will be negated by reducing, on most existing items, the requests for clarification about large variances from prior year values.

Item	Item Name (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition
510	Closed Outlets Due to COVID-19 (C19CLOSE)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Were any of the library’s outlets physically closed to the public for any period of time due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: An outlet is considered physically closed when the public cannot access any library buildings or bookmobiles, regardless of staff access. A building can be physically closed but still offer virtual, Wi-Fi, or “curbside” services outside the building.</p>
511	Public Services During COVID-19 (C19PUBSV)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did library staff continue to provide services to the public during any portion of the period when the building was physically closed to the public due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Services to the public can include activities such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answering calls, emails, or texts with answers to information requests from the public; • hosting virtual programming or recorded content; • offering “curbside,” delivery (mail or drop-off), or drive-thru circulation of physical materials; • managing IT services to ensure external Wi-Fi access; and • providing other types of online and electronic services, <p>regardless of the location of library staff when they provided services (i.e., working from home or in the building that was closed to the public).</p>
512	Electronic Materials Added Due to COVID-19 (C19ELMAT)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library add or increase access to electronic collection materials due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Adding or increasing materials can include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the concurrent or monthly borrowing limits for electronic materials, • increasing the number of electronic materials and holdings, or • otherwise augmenting the public’s ability to use electronic materials. <p>These materials can include those the library did not pay for itself, such</p>

Item	Item Name (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition
		<p>as those provided through the state library administrative agency, library consortium, or vendor at no cost in response to the pandemic.</p> <p>Types of electronic materials include e-books, audio and video downloadables, e-serials (including journals), government documents, databases (including locally mounted, full text or not), electronic files, reference tools, scores, maps, or pictures in electronic or digital format, including materials digitized by the library.</p>
513	Electronic Library Cards Issued Before COVID-19 (C19ECRD1)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library allow users to complete registration for library cards online without having to come to the library before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Online library cards provide users access to electronic collection materials and databases without having to be physically present at a library outlet to register for the card. Refer to the definition of Registered User (data element #503).</p>
514	Electronic Library Cards Issued During COVID-19 (C19ECRD2)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library allow users to complete registration for library cards online without having to come to the library during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Online library cards provide users access to electronic collection materials and databases without having to be physically present at a library outlet to register for the card. Refer to the definition of Registered User (data element #503).</p>
515	Reference Service During COVID-19 (C19REFER)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library provide reference service via the Internet or telephone when the building was physically closed to the public during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Refer to the definition of Reference Transactions (data element #502). Include references service provided via email, chat, and text.</p>
516	Curbside Service During COVID-19 (C19CURBS)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library provide ‘outside’ service for circulation of physical materials at one or more outlets during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Includes any contactless or minimal contact provision of circulation items. Similar terms could include curbside, vestibule, or porch pickups, delivery (mail or drop-off), drive-thru, etc.</p>
517	Live Virtual Programs During COVID-19 (C19LIVEP)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library provide live, virtual programs via the Internet during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Live, virtual programs (see definition of Total Number of Library programs, data element #600) are conducted via a Web conferencing or Webinar platform such as Facebook,</p>

Item	Item Name (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition
		YouTube, or Zoom, during which a library staff member (or other party sponsored by the library) is presenting to or interacting with an audience in real-time.
518	Recordings of Program Content During COVID-19 (C19RECRD)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library create and provide recordings of program content via the Internet during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Recorded content includes video or audio recordings created by a library staff person (or other party sponsored by the library) and posted to a video or audio hosting platform for the audience to view or listen to on-demand. Do not include promotional or marketing content.</p>
519	External WiFi Access Before COVID-19 (C19XWIF1)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library provide Wi-Fi Internet access to users outside the building at one or more outlets before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Includes “parking lot access,” bookmobiles or other mobile facilities with Wi-Fi capabilities.</p>
520	External WiFi Access During COVID-19 (C19XWIF2)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library intentionally provide Wi-Fi Internet access to users outside the building at one or more outlets during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Includes “parking lot access,” bookmobiles or other mobile facilities with Wi-Fi capabilities.</p>
521	External WiFi Access Increase COVID-19 (C19XWIF3)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did the library increase access to Wi-Fi Internet access to users outside the building at one or more outlets during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Includes “parking lot access,” bookmobiles or other mobile facilities with Wi-Fi capabilities. Increasing access could mean removing restrictions on sign-in authorizations, expanding router reach, leaving Wi-Fi service on 24 hours, installing or moving access points to promote or improve external access, etc.</p>
522	Staff Re-Assigned During COVID-19 (C19STOTH)	<p>Answer <Y>es or <N>o to the following question: “<i>Did library staff work for other government agencies or nonprofit organizations instead of, or in addition to, their normal duties during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?</i>”</p> <p>NOTE: Include reassignments to other government agencies (e.g., to process unemployment claims), as well as other activities such as the use of library staff to distribute school lunches and other materials. Volunteering during work hours would count but volunteering off hours would not.</p>
715	Number of Weeks an Outlet Closed Due to COVID-19	This is the number of weeks during the year that due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, an outlet building was physically closed, and the

Item	Item Name (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition
	(C19WKSCL)	<p>public could not enter, when it otherwise would have been open.</p> <p>NOTE: Round to the nearest whole number. If building did not close to the public due to the pandemic, enter zero. Totalling Item 714 and Item 715 should equal or be fewer than 52 weeks.</p> <p>An outlet is considered physically closed when the public cannot access any library buildings or bookmobiles, regardless of staff access. A building can be physically closed but still offer virtual, Wi-Fi, or “curbside” services outside the building.</p>
716	Number of Weeks an Outlet Had Limited Occupancy Due to COVID-19 (C19WKSPP)	<p>This is the number of weeks during the year that an outlet implemented limited public occupancy practices for in-person services at the library building in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.</p> <p>NOTE: Round to the nearest whole number. If building did not have a limited occupancy or similar practice due to the pandemic, enter zero. Weeks can be counted in both #714 and #716 (that is, a library was open to the public and implementing limited occupancy practices in the same week). Item #716 should not be greater than #714.</p> <p>Limited public occupancy practices can include reduced hours open, limits on the number of public members inside the physical building, appointment only on-site library use, visitor time limits, closed stacks or meeting rooms, etc.</p>

Link to current FY 2019 instrument:

Data element definitions: https://www.impls.gov/sites/default/files/pls_users_guide_fy2019.pdf#page=50