

# Cognitive Testing for FY2025/26 Public Libraries Survey Interview Guide

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## Verbal Script

- Hello. My name is [name]. I work for Activate Research, and I will be conducting your interview today. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. *[If applicable, use any of the following: My colleague [name] is joining me today to assist with taking notes. Once we start the conversation, they'll stay off camera so they can focus on typing. And/or My colleague [name, from AIR] is here to listen in today.]*
- Activate is working with another company called the American Institutes for Research, or AIR. AIR and Activate are working with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, or IMLS, to develop potential questions and terminology definitions for the national Public Libraries Survey, or PLS. The PLS questions are incorporated into your state's annual report so that the data can be combined with data from libraries in every state. Some of the proposed items that we'll discuss today are new, while others represent changes to existing items. Your state survey may already ask questions similar to the ones we are proposing here. If so, please feel free to comment on whether your state has a question like what we're discussing and any differences you notice between your state's question and the question we pose today.
- We are conducting interviews with library administrators like you to gather feedback on the draft items. Your input will help to identify any potential issues and determine whether the questions and definitions make sense and are relevant. The State Library Administrative Agencies will vote on whether to add some or all of these data elements this summer, or potentially in summer 2025.
- During our interview, I'll show you questions and definitions on the screen and ask you to read them out loud. Then, I'd like for you to "think aloud"—that is, tell me what you are thinking—as you determine your answer or describe *how* you would determine your answer. Afterwards, I'll ask you some follow-up questions.
- I completely understand that your library may not currently collect all of the information that we'll be discussing today. For the purposes of this interview, there are no right or wrong answers. Hearing *how* you arrive at your answers and whether it is *feasible* for you to answer will help us determine whether any changes are needed.
- Our interview today will last 60 minutes and is completely voluntary. Everything you say will be confidential, so please speak freely. The AIR/Activate team will report the findings combined for all of the interviews we conduct, and we will not use your name or the name of your library in any of our reports.
- We will be recording today's session to ensure that we capture everything you say and fully understand your thoughts. Only the AIR/Activate research team will have access to the recording, and notes from the interview will be deleted after the final report is submitted.
- Is it okay if I begin the recording?
  - **[If yes] Begin recording**
  - **[If no]** Begin interview with no recording and add "Participant declined recording" at the top of the notes.
- **[If video camera not on]** Do you have a video camera that we could use? **[If yes]** Would you mind turning it on? I've found that having the video on to see each other is helpful during interviews.
- Before we continue, I'd like to show you what I mean when I ask you to "think aloud" during the conversation, since it's not necessarily something we commonly do.

- For example, here's how I would think aloud. First, I would read the question out loud: How many windows are in your home?
- Would you like to give it a try? **[If yes, same question]**
- Great! You're ready to go.

General Probes	
Problematic instructions or items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is this instruction telling you?</li> <li>• In your own words, what is this question asking?</li> <li>• What were you thinking when you answered this question?</li> </ul>
Unclear/confusing words or terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does <b>[term]</b> mean to you?</li> <li>• Tell me what you were thinking when you read <b>[term]</b>.</li> </ul>
Unclear/confusing definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were you thinking as you read that definition?</li> <li>• How could we make the definition clearer or less confusing?</li> </ul>
Inadequate response options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any response options that are missing from this question?</li> <li>• How could we expand these response options to better reflect your experience?</li> </ul>
Other cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I noticed you hesitated when answering this question. Can you tell me why that was?</li> <li>• I noticed that you changed your answer to this question. What was the reason?</li> </ul>

## Begin Testing

**[MODERATOR:** Begin sharing your screen to show the respondent the draft data elements. Repeat instruction below as needed for each new item until the respondent begins to read new items aloud without prompting. Where applicable, ask the probe(s) next to the response option the respondent selects before asking overall probes. You do not have to ask every probe verbatim if the respondent gives an answer to the probe as part of earlier conversation.]

**MODERATOR:** Okay, let's get started. The first slide shows a set of data elements about programming, and then provides a definition for one type of programming: general interest programming. Will you please read aloud the definition, and then I'll ask you some questions about how you would use this definition to determine how many general interest programs you had at your library.

### Item 1: Number of Synchronous General Interest Program Sessions

[For context: Number of Synchronous General Interest Program Sessions is part of a series with these other data elements:

Number of Synchronous Program Sessions Targeted at Children Ages 0-5

Number of Synchronous Program Sessions Targeted at Children Ages 6-11

Number of Synchronous Program Sessions Targeted at Young Adults Ages 12-18

Number of Synchronous Program Sessions Targeted at Adults Ages 19 or Older]

#### INFORMATION ABOUT THE AE

### Number of Synchronous General Interest Program Sessions

*Proposed revised data element definition:*

A general interest program session is any planned event that is appropriate for any age group or multiple age groups. Include all-age, all-library, family, and intergenerational program sessions. Examples of these types of program sessions include, but are not limited to, family game nights, holiday events, storytelling programs, or chess clubs. Include all programs here that do not fit into the other age category elements. Each program session should only be counted in one age category based on its primary target audience; do not include program sessions here that have already been counted in earlier age category elements. This figure is a subset of the Total Number of Synchronous Program Sessions (data element 600). See Synchronous Program Session definition for more information about counting program sessions.

a) In your own words, what does this element definition mean?	•
b) Based on the definition, what sorts of programming would you include in this category? <i>Listen for: programming intended for children ages 0-11 or 0-18 (i.e., spanning the earlier children’s categories)</i>	•
c) Based on the definition, what sorts of programming would you exclude from this category? <i>Listen for: programming intended for children ages 0-11 or 0-18 (i.e., spanning the earlier children’s categories)</i>	•
d) Is there anything confusing or unclear about this definition? Please describe.	•
e) Would you make any changes to improve this definition? If so, what changes would you make?	•

**MODERATOR:** The next slides are about reservable spaces and reservations. Let’s take a look.

**Items 2 and 3: Reservable spaces and use**

#### INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS

##### Number of reservable spaces for use by the public

**Reservable spaces** can be enclosed rooms (e.g., a meeting or study room) or a designated area within the library (e.g., alcove, corner). Count spaces available for both reserved and ad hoc use, as long as the spaces **can be reserved** by members of the public. Count spaces available for public use, even if it is also used for nonpublic events (e.g., library staff meetings).

a) Based on the definition, what would you include as a reservable space?	•
b) Based on the definition, what would you exclude as a reservable space?	•

c) This item says “for use by the public.” What does that mean to you?	•
d) [For multi-outlet AEs] Would you be able to report this number for each outlet?	•
e) Is there anything confusing or unclear about this definition? Please describe.	•
f) Would you make any changes to improve this definition? If so, what changes would you make?	•
<p><b>Number of times members of the public reserved spaces for non-library-sponsored or co-sponsored use</b></p> <p><b>Number of reservations:</b> Count number of reservations, not the number of attendees. If a room was reserved for a multi-day event, count each day as separate use. For example, if a group reserved the room on Friday and Saturday, count this as two reservations. Count both free and paid use, and count use both during and outside regular library hours. Do not count ad hoc/non-reserved use.</p> <p><b>Non-library-sponsored or co-sponsored:</b> For an event to be sponsored or co-sponsored by the library, the library must contribute financial resources or staff time toward the event. Please only count reservations for sessions that are NOT sponsored by the library.</p>	
g) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question?	•
h) Do you track reservations for these types of spaces? If so, how?	•
<p>i) Looking at both definitions, is there anything confusing or unclear about either? Please explain.</p> <p><i>Follow-up question if not discussed:</i> The definition for number of reservations includes this sentence that gives the example of Friday/Saturday use. Is this sentence necessary for understanding the definition?</p>	•
j) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

**MODERATOR:** For the next several slides, we want to learn more about how easy or hard it would be to report certain items at the outlet level, as opposed to the AE level—which is how they are currently collected for the national PLS. It is possible your state survey already collects some or all of these items at the outlet level.

[Moderator note: for participants from multi-outlet AEs, please ask all questions below. For participants from single-outlet AEs, only ask about Wi-Fi sessions (item 6).]

**Item 4: Total Physical Items in Collection**

**INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS**

**Total physical items in collection**

**Definition:** All circulating physical items in the collection. These are materials in a fixed, physical format available

for use outside the library. This includes Print Materials, Audio – physical units, Video – physical units, and Other Circulating Physical Items.

Count the number of units officially housed at or owned by the outlet. Count floating collection units based on their location on the last day of the reporting period.

a) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question for your outlet(s)?	•
b) What ILS do you use? Would your ILS allow you to report number of units on the last day of the reporting period?	•
c) <i>(if not already addressed)</i> Do you track different types of materials in different ways?  <i>Listen for: floating units. If not mentioned, ask the participant if they have floating units.</i>	•
d) This definition relies on the concept of “housing” or “owning” units. Can you tell me a bit about how your library thinks about attributing units to an outlet?	•
e) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

### Item 5: Physical Item Circulation

#### INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS

##### Physical Item Circulation

**Definition:** The total annual circulation of all physical library materials of all types, including renewals.

Note: Count all physical materials in all formats that are charged out for use outside an outlet. Interlibrary loan transactions included are only items borrowed for users. Do not include items checked out to another library. Count circulation according to the outlet from which the item was checked out, regardless of which outlet houses or owns the item.

a) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question for your outlet(s)?	•
b) Would you be able to obtain this information from your ILS?  <i>Listen for issues related to counting where the item was checked out rather than housed/owned. If not addressed, probe on this matter specifically.</i>	•
c) <i>(If not already addressed)</i> Do you track different types of materials in different ways?  <i>Listen for: floating units. If not mentioned, ask the participant if they have floating units.</i>	•

d) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•
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**Item 6: Wi-Fi Sessions/Reporting Method**

**INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS**

*Wireless sessions*

**Definition:** Report the number of wireless sessions provided by the library wireless service annually. Count one session for each time a device connects to the outlet’s wireless network, regardless of the duration of connection. If possible, only count sessions for patron devices and exclude library devices such as routers, access points, printers, and public access computers; otherwise, if patron devices cannot be isolated, report sessions for all devices.

NOTE: If an annual count of wireless sessions is unavailable, count wireless sessions during a typical week or weeks using methods like hardware logging or network scanning, and multiply the count to represent an annual estimate. (Do not conduct visual surveys of devices in use as a method to establish a count of a typical week.) 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.

*Wireless sessions reporting method*

Regarding the number of wireless sessions entered, is this an annual count or an annual estimate based on a typical week or weeks of hardware logging or network scanning?

a) Would you be able to report this information at the outlet level? <i>If not answered during response, for multi-outlet systems: Do you track WiFi sessions in the same way for each outlet in your system?</i>	•
b) If you were asked to report this at the outlet level, who would need to be involved in the process for you to be able to get this information?	•
c) If you were asked to report this at the outlet level, what reporting method would you use - annual count or annual estimate?	•
d) If you were asked to report this at the outlet level, how confident would you be in the accuracy of the information you could provide?	•
e) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

**Item 7: Public Internet Computers**

**INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS**

### Number of Internet computers used by the general public

**Definition:** Report the number of the outlet’s Internet computers [personal computers (PCs), laptops, and tablets], whether purchased, leased, or donated, used by the general public in the library. Do not include computers that connect to the Internet for a dedicated purpose (e.g., to access an OPAC or specific database, or to train the public) or purposes.

a) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question for your outlet(s)?	•
b) Is there anything about this definition that is confusing?	•
c) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

### Item 8: Public Internet Sessions/Reporting Method

#### INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS

#### Number of uses (sessions) of public Internet computers per year

**Definition:** Report the total number of uses (sessions) of the outlet’s Internet computers in the library during the last year. If the computer is used for multiple purposes (Internet access, word-processing, OPAC, etc.) and Internet uses (sessions) cannot be isolated, report all usage. A typical week or other reliable estimate may be used to determine the annual number. Sign-up forms or Web-log tracking software also may provide a reliable count of uses (sessions).

Note: This count includes only the outlet’s Internet computers. Do not include WiFi access using nonlibrary computers. The number of uses (sessions) may be counted manually, using registration logs. Count each use (session) for public internet computers, regardless of the amount of time spent on the computer. A use (session) on the library’s public internet computer(s) three times a year would count as three uses (sessions). Software such as “Historian” can also be used to track the number of uses (sessions) at each public internet computer. If the data element is collected as a weekly figure, multiply that figure by 52 to annualize it.

#### Public Internet Computer Sessions Reporting Method

Regarding the number of uses (sessions) of public internet computers per year entered, is this an annual count or an annual estimate based on a typical week or weeks?

a) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question for your outlet(s)?	•
b) How do you track this information?  <i>If not answered during response, for multi-outlet systems: Do you track computer sessions in the same way for each outlet in your</i>	•

system?	
c) If you were required to report this at the outlet level, what reporting method would you use – annual count or annual estimate?	•
d) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

**Item 9: Library Visits/Reporting Method**

**INFORMATION ABOUT OUTLETS**

*Library visits*

**Definition:** This is the total number of persons entering the library for whatever purpose during the year.

Note: If an actual count of visits is unavailable, determine an annual estimate by counting visits during a typical week in October and multiplying the count by 52. 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 the library. Choose a week in which the library is open its regular hours. Include seven consecutive calendar days, from Sunday through Saturday (or whenever the library is usually open).

*Library visits reporting method*

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

a) How easy or difficult would it be for you to answer this question for your outlet(s)?	•
b) How do you track visits to outlets in your system?  <i>If not answered during response, for multi-outlet systems: Do you track visits in the same way for each outlet in your system?</i>	•
c) If you were required to report this at the outlet level, what reporting method would you use – annual count or annual estimate?	•
d) Would you make any changes to improve this data element? If so, what changes would you make?	•

**GENERAL SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**MODERATOR:** *[Stop sharing screen]* I have a few questions that relate to what we were just discussing, but are at a bigger picture level.

1. How, if at all, do you currently use outlet-level data in your library system?
  - a. *Listen for internal system comparison; comparison to other systems. Probe:*



- i. Are the topics we discussed today the kinds of data elements that you'd want to be able to compare, either across outlets within your system (*for multiple-outlet AEs*) or between your outlets and outlets in (an)other system(s)?
  - ii. [*For single-outlet AE*] Are there any library systems in your region with multiple branches? If so, would you want to be able to compare your library to any of those individual branches? If so, what kinds of topics would you want to compare?
  - iii. Are there other topics that you would want to be able to compare?
2. As we're talking about collecting data at the outlet level, it's helpful to be able to understand what libraries consider to be outlets.
  - a. Does your library/system have any kiosks or off-site pickup lockers? If so, do you consider those to be outlets?
  - b. Does your library/system have any other kinds of outlets that are different from the typical "library branch" type of outlet?

## Closing

Those are all the items I wanted to get your feedback on today. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. The insights you provided will help to ensure that the items included in the Public Libraries Survey are as appropriate and understandable as possible for institutions like yours. Enjoy the rest of your day!