

Memorandum to OMB: Description of Changes to the FY 2026 Public Libraries Survey (OMB #3137-0074)

Background

The Public Libraries Survey (PLS) is an annual census of public libraries in the United States, conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in partnership with state library administrative agencies (SLAAs). The PLS provides nationally consistent data used by federal, state, and local stakeholders to assess library services, resources, and infrastructure.

This memo describes changes to the previously approved PLS data elements and data collection instructions for the FY 2026 collection cycle. The changes are based on recommendations from the Library Statistics Working Group (LSWG) in consultation with methodologists. The recommendations aim to improve the quality and clarity of data elements, aligning reporting structures for library outlets (e.g., central and branch libraries) and refining priority measures, while maintaining stability in the overall collection. These changes do not alter the nature or intent of the information collection, change the respondent universe or collection frequency, or increase respondent burden.

FY 2026 PLS Instrument Changes

OMB approved the FY2024 – FY2026 PLS collection materials in November 2024. In preparation for the FY 2026 cycle, IMLS consulted with the LSWG in winter 2025 to evaluate potential changes for the collection scheduled to open in January 2027. IMLS subsequently received agreement from SLAAs—the respondents to the PLS—in fall 2025.

IMLS requests approval of the following changes to the FY 2026 PLS instrument and supporting materials:

- **REVISIONS** (Table 1): One data element clarification on the outlet reporting requirements for bookmobiles and four revisions removing references to deleted data elements.
- **DELETIONS** (Table 2): Four synchronous program session/attendance subcomponents, two asynchronous program metrics are no longer required, and one obsolete bookmobile item.
- **ADDITIONS** (Table 3): Three new data elements related to public meeting space availability and use.

The first year of collection for new PLS data elements is a trial year to allow states time to integrate items into state surveys and train libraries on reporting. This memo includes:

- Appendix A – FY 2026 PLS Instrument/Data Elements (tracked changes version)
- Appendix B – FY 2026 PLS Instrument/Data Elements (clean version)

Table 1. Data Elements Proposed for Revision for the FY 2026 PLS

Data Element	Data Element (Variable Name)	Change Description	Justification
709	Outlet Type Code (C_OUT_TY)	Revise the definition for a Bookmobile to note that a separate outlet record must be created for each bookmobile.	Clarifies reporting expectations and supports consistent data structure for bookmobile outlet records.
600	Total Number of Synchronous Program Sessions (TOTPRO)	Remove explanation that this total is the sum of subordinate data elements.	The removal of some of the subordinate data elements (see Table 2) makes this part of the definition obsolete.
607	Number of Synchronous In-Person Offsite Program Sessions (OFFPRO)	Remove explanation that this total is the sum of subordinate data elements.	The removal of some of the subordinate data elements (see Table 2) makes this part of the definition obsolete.
610	Total Attendance at Synchronous Programs (TOTATTEN)	Remove explanation that this total is the sum of subordinate data elements.	The removal of some of the subordinate data elements (see Table 2) makes this part of the definition obsolete.
617	Synchronous In-Person Offsite Program Attendance (OFFATTEN)	Remove explanation that this total is the sum of subordinate data elements.	The removal of some of the subordinate data elements (see Table 2) makes this part of the definition obsolete.

Table 2: Data Elements Proposed for Deletion from FY 2026 PLS

Data Element	Data Element (Variable Name)	Justification
606	Number of Synchronous In-Person Onsite Program Sessions (ONPRO)	Reduces reporting detail that is a subset of broader program totals retained in the PLS; improves efficiency without increasing burden.
608	Number of Synchronous Virtual Program Sessions (VIRPRO)	Reduces reporting detail that is a subset of broader program totals retained in the PLS; improves efficiency without increasing burden.
616	Synchronous In-Person	Reduces reporting detail that is a subset of

Data Element	Data Element (Variable Name)	Justification
	Onsite Program Attendance (ONATTEN)	broader attendance totals retained in the PLS; improves efficiency without increasing burden.
618	Synchronous Virtual Program Attendance (VIRATTEN)	Reduces reporting detail that is a subset of broader attendance totals retained in the PLS; improves efficiency without increasing burden.
620	Total Number of Asynchronous Program Presentations (TOTPRES)	Removes an asynchronous program metric that is no longer required for PLS reporting purposes; simplifies reporting.
630	Total Views of Asynchronous Program Presentations within 30 Days (TOTVIEWS)	Removes an asynchronous program metric that is no longer required for PLS reporting purposes; simplifies reporting.
712	Number of Bookmobiles in the Bookmobile Outlet Record (L_NUM_BM)	Becomes obsolete when each bookmobile is reported as a separate outlet record; supports consistent outlet record data structure.

Table 3: Data Elements Proposed for Addition for the FY 2026 PLS

Data Element	Data Element (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition	Justification
720	Total Number of Meeting Spaces Available to the Public (TOTMEET)	A meeting space is a room or area designated by your library for the purpose of holding meetings, whether in-person or virtual. Examples include meeting rooms, study rooms/pods, alcoves, auditoriums, and conference rooms. Count the total number of meeting spaces available to members of the public, including all reservable and non-reservable meeting spaces. Count meeting spaces available for public use, even if they are also used for nonpublic events (e.g., library staff meetings).	Adds a standardized measure of the availability of public meeting spaces to improve understanding of library facilities and public use offerings.
721	Number of Reservable Meeting Spaces Available to the Public	A reservable meeting space is a room or area designated by your library for the purpose of holding meetings that members of the public can reserve in advance or at the time of use. Examples include meeting rooms, study rooms/pods,	Distinguishes spaces the public can reserve, improving interpretability of meeting space

Data Element	Data Element (Variable Name)	Data Element Definition	Justification
	(RESMEET)	alcoves, auditoriums, and conference rooms. Count the number of meeting spaces that members of the public can reserve in advance or at the time of use. Count reservable meeting spaces available for public use, even if they are also used for nonpublic events (e.g., library staff meetings). This count is a subset of Total Number of Meeting Spaces Available to the Public (Data Element 720).	access and management practices.
722	Number of Times Members of the Public Reserved Meeting Spaces (RESERVES)	Count the total number of reservations made in advance or at the time of use during the reporting period. Count both free and paid reservations, and reservations during and outside regular library hours. Do not count times when members of the public used the space without a reservation. Do not count the number of attendees. Exclude reservations for library programs and events. If a room was reserved for a multi-day event, count each day as a separate reservation. For example, if a group reserved the meeting room on Friday and Saturday, count this as two reservations.	Adds a standardized usage measure to complement meeting space availability and support analysis of demand for reservable public space.