Measurement and Metrics for US Presidential Libraries

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Abstract

Although there are established measurements and metrics for academic libraries, there are few, if any, for presidential libraries, especially hybrid presidential libraries. The presidential library system, which is part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), administers 13 libraries documenting the lives and work of US presidents since Herbert Hoover (1929–1933). Libraries and museums documenting the lives of earlier presidents are housed and administered in a variety of ways—by foundations, universities, state historical libraries, and state governments. This presentation examines and compares the characteristics and current practices of NARA and pre-NARA presidential libraries and attempts to identify guidelines and metrics for measuring them. It examines in depth the unique characteristics and challenges of two pre-NARA presidential libraries: the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, IL, and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which owns and operates Monticello in Charlottesville, VA.

Introduction

Although there are established measurements and metrics for academic libraries, there are few, if any, for presidential libraries, especially hybrid presidential sites, which combine libraries and archives with home sites, museums, and education centers. The federal presidential library system, which is part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), administers 13 sites. These preserve archives and artifacts documenting the lives and work of US presidents since Herbert Hoover (1929–1933). Libraries and museums documenting earlier presidents are administered in a variety of ways—by foundations, universities, state historical libraries, and state governments.

NARA Presidential Libraries

There are currently 13 NARA presidential libraries documenting the lives of presidents from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush. The inspiration for the system came from the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, which opened to the public on May 30, 1916. The Hayes Center inspired Franklin Delano Roosevelt to establish a library to house his papers on the Roosevelt estate in Hyde Park, NY, in 1939.

In 1950, Harry S. Truman decided that he, too, would build a library to house his presidential papers and helped to spur congressional action. The Presidential Libraries Act of 1955 (http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/laws/1955-act.html) established a system of privately built and federally maintained libraries. In each case, funds from private and non-federal public sources provided the funds to build the library. Once completed, the private organization turned over the libraries to NARA to operate and maintain.

The Presidential Records Act of 1978 (http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/laws/1978-act.html) established that the presidential records that document the constitutional, statutory, and ceremonial duties of the president are the property of the United States government. After a president leaves office, the archivist of the United States assumes custody of the records. The act allowed for the continuation of presidential libraries as the repository for presidential records. There are currently 13 NARA presidential libraries that follow national standards for preservation and access to public records established by statute and administered by NARA. NARA establishes the metrics used by these libraries.

Pre-NARA Libraries

In addition to the 13 NARA presidential libraries, there are commemorative sites for 29 presidents, some of which support research libraries for scholars and some with information centers for staff use only. These sites, addressing 69% of American presidential history,[1] range widely in governance, funding, staffing, programming, public engagement, and support of scholarly endeavors. There is no network or association within which these libraries share common values or data-driven planning, and even a listing of agencies associated with the American presidency is hard to come by. The Jefferson Library at Monticello and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum are pre-NARA presidential libraries, and they will be described and assessed in some detail. In addition, findings of a survey of key sites representing all presidents prior to Herbert Hoover will be presented.

The Jefferson Library at Monticello and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

The Jefferson Library (JL) opened on April 13, 2002, and adopted as its mission: "to provide access to information on Thomas Jefferson's life, times, and legacy." JL is the information services and resources provider and the institutional archives repository for the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (TJF), which has owned and operated Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, since 1923. TJF is incorporated as a 501c3 and has over 300 staff members, of whom 200 have academic knowledge-based jobs. JL is a component of the International Center for Jefferson Studies (ICJS) founded in 1994, which provides residential fellowships for 30 research fellows and hosts another two dozen visiting scholars per year. In the past 20 years these fellows and scholars have produced over 400 publications based on work at Monticello. JL supports other key components of TJF: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* (Princeton University Press), Archaeology and the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery, Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, the Curatorial and Restoration Department, and the Education and Visitor Programs Department. Many students, researchers, and scholars from the University of Virginia, which was founded by Jefferson in 1816–1819 across town from Monticello, conduct work at the JL.

JL commenced with 5,000 uncatalogued books, 50+ years accumulation of gray literature and images, and 80 years of TJF unprocessed archives. Since 2002 it has grown to 25,000 books and 10,000 research reports and vertical files. The integrated library system provides analyzed and abstracted records for all material. Two-thirds of the institutional archives, which originally consisted of 1,500 linear feet of "stuff," have been processed into 75 record groups and finding aids entered into the Archon archives management system for public access. Particular emphasis on acquisition of digital historical resources has resulted in provision of nearly 100 databases containing over 100 million full-text titles. JL has become the Library of Record for Thomas Jefferson research and scholarship.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum traces its roots to 1889 when the Illinois General Assembly established the Illinois State Historical Library as a repository for materials on the state's political, social, and religious history. A large collection of Lincoln materials collected by Illinois governor Henry Horner and willed to the library upon his death in 1940 formed the foundation of the library's Lincoln Collection. Later additions included the 1942 acquisition of an original copy of the Gettysburg Address in Lincoln's hand purchased in part with pennies donated by schoolchildren, an extensive collection of other manuscripts written or signed by Lincoln, as well as books, photographs, and artifacts relating to his life, times, and legacy.

Although known for its namesake, the library contains an outstanding collection of materials on Illinois' history, including eight miles of below-ground stacks that house books, original maps, and thousands of boxes of personal papers and other records relating to Illinois' political, business, and cultural leaders. The print collection includes over 200,000 volumes. The manuscripts department contains roughly 6,000 manuscript collections with over 12 million items; approximately 1,100 of the collections have a Civil War component. The AV department contains over 500,000 photographs and negatives, as well as over 20,000 films, videotapes, audiotapes, posters, broadsides, and works of art. The Lincoln Collection contains roughly 52,000 items, including manuscripts, published items, relics, artworks, newspapers, broadsides, prints, maps, and music. The library is responsible for microfilming approximately 270 local newspapers from 102 Illinois counties. The newspaper collection has 100,000 reels of microfilm. The library hosts approximately 48,000 visitors annually.

The Survey

The authors sought to identify the characteristics of pre-NARA libraries and to learn if the data collected by the libraries were similar to those found in previous surveys. They also wanted to identify how the libraries used the data and what data were considered useful for measuring performance and doing planning. They used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather this information.

Robertson phoned, e-mailed, and visited a number of pre-NARA presidential libraries. His calls and visits identified a survey population of 29 sites (Appendix 1). A distinction was drawn between sites that supported scholarly research libraries and archives versus those with information collections for staff use only. Depending on the specific circumstances at each agency, the following elements were included in conversations conducted during site visits:
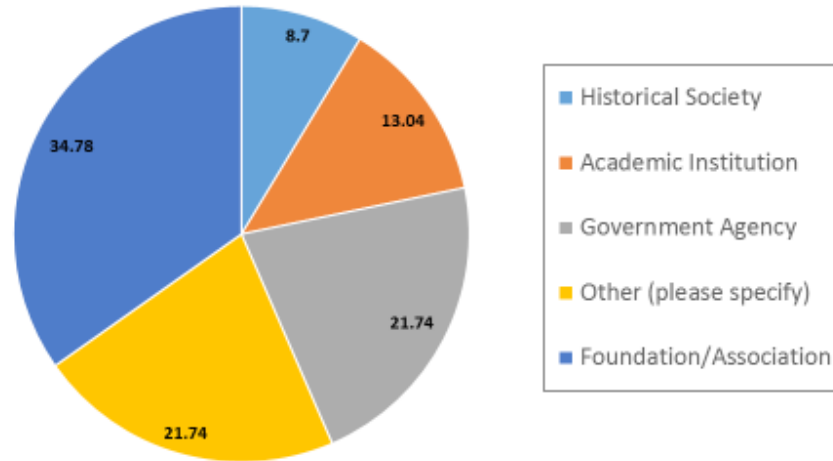
1. Nature/scope of collections: formats/date ranges/scholarly, popular, fiction, young readers; journals by titles and/or individual articles/ephemera/newspapers/microforms/pictorial and audio-visual resources; full-text digital historical resources
2. Nature/scope of library staffing: librarians/archivists/preservationists/tech support/volunteers and interns
3. Nature of library clientele: institution staff, local students/teachers, area college students/faculty, visiting scholars; is there support/fellowships for scholars/academic researchers?
4. Nature/scope of physical facilities: age/size/public, staff, storage
5. Archives: original manuscripts/facsimiles/family and friends/digital finding aids and/or digital content initiatives
6. Electronic outreach: online catalog/website (and stats)/online pubs/born-digital scholarship/digital dissemination initiatives
7. Funding sources: through governing agency operating budgets/endowments/fund raising/grants
8. Connections/collaborations/networking: with local/regional/national education/culture/government/descendants group
9. One to five year documents: policies and procedures, plans, visioning, assessments, annual reports

After reviewing the literature, the authors drafted a 10-question instrument (Appendix 2) based on Veit's survey of presidential libraries.[2] They revised the questions for electronic distribution via SurveyMonkey, and added questions about types of data collected and used for planning purposes. Thirty-eight sites were identified and the survey was sent to contacts at 29 agencies from July 1 to 8, 2016. Twenty-three (79.3%) sites responded. The responding sites reported to and were governed by foundations or associations, government agencies, historical societies, and other types of institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Parent Institution of pre-NARAs

Table 1
Parent Institution of pre-NARAs

The data most commonly collected (see Table 2) and considered useful for planning (see Table 3) include information on:
- Collection
- Expenditures
- Personnel
- Instruction
- Reference
- Use of electronic resources
- Interlibrary loans
- Gate count
- Exhibits
- Visits to web site
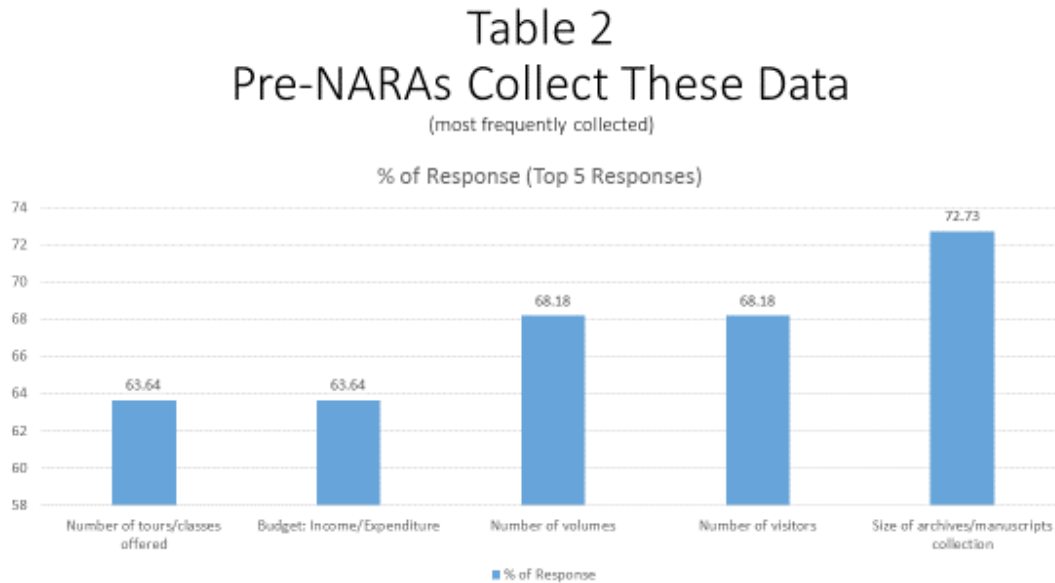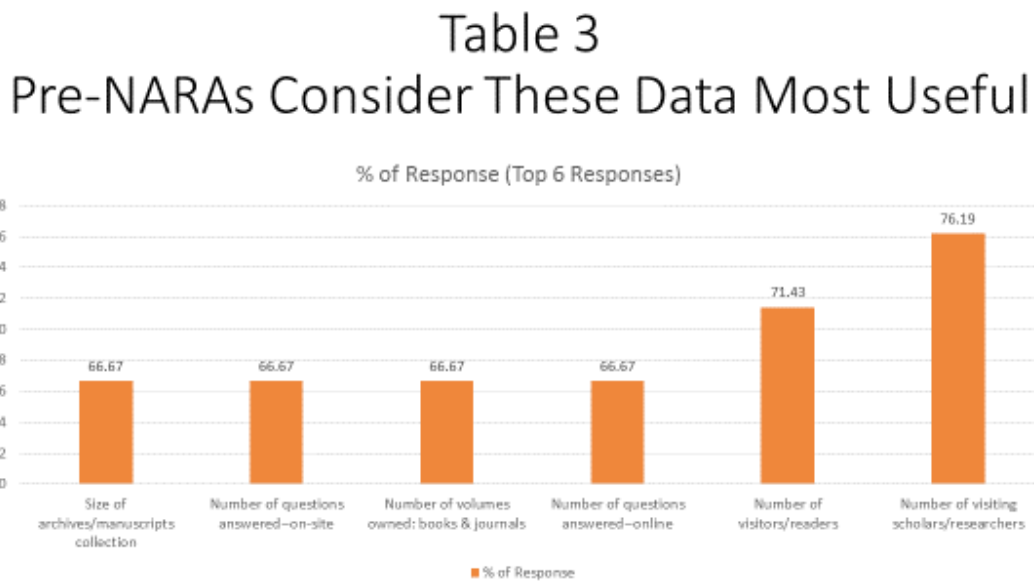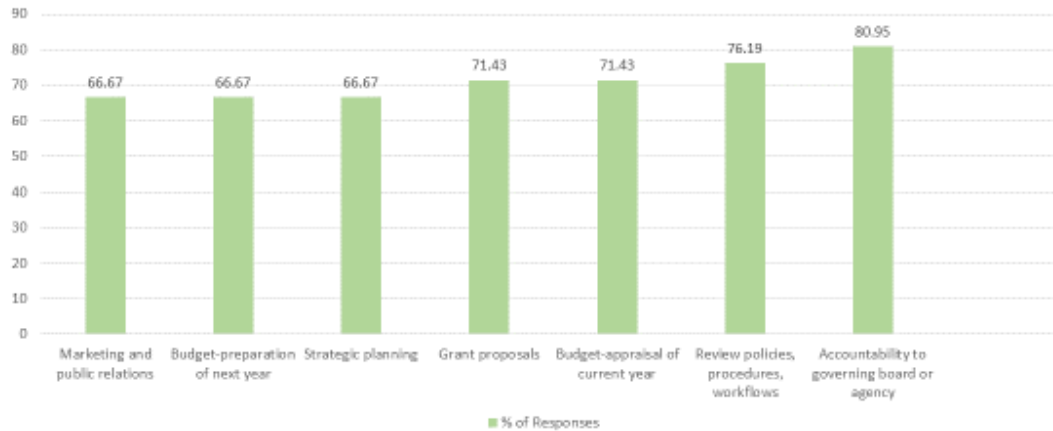
Table 2: Pre-NARAs Collect These Data

Table 2
Pre-NARAs Collect These Data
(most frequently collected)

% of Response (Top 5 Responses)

Category	% of Response
Number of tours/classes offered	63.64
Budget: Income/Expenditure	63.64
Number of volumes	68.18
Number of visitors	68.18
Size of archives/manuscripts collection	72.73

■ % of Response

Table 3: Pre-NARAs Consider These Data Most Useful

Table 3
Pre-NARAs Consider These Data Most Useful

% of Response (Top 6 Responses)

Category	% of Response
Size of archives/manuscripts collection	66.67
Number of questions answered–on-site	66.67
Number of volumes owned: books & journals	66.67
Number of questions answered–online	66.67
Number of visitors/readers	71.43
Number of visiting scholars/researchers	76.19

■ % of Response

The libraries use these data for reporting back to governing boards, reviewing policies and procedures, budgeting, planning, and marketing (see Table 4).

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Table 4: Top Ways pre-NARAs Use Data

Table 4
Top Ways pre-NARAs Use Data

Data most commonly required by the parent institution include:
- Number of visitors
- Number of research transactions
- Expenditures
  - Staff
  - Collections
  - Other resources
- Staff size
- Collection
  - Size
  - Additions
  - Use by researchers

Respondents identified the following data "not currently collected and not listed in the survey" as potentially useful for planning and decision making:
- Core benchmarks for pre-NARAs
- Number of visitors/tours
- Total annual budget
- Total collection size
- Total staff
  - Number of volunteers
- Size of collection storage (square feet)
- Publicity/outreach; media coverage of library
- Partner libraries and archives
- Use of library web site
  - Use of online catalog

Conclusions

This paper describes attempts to identify libraries that support inquiry into the lives and legacy of presidents prior to the establishment of NARA presidential libraries. Identification was complicated by the fact that these sites include historic homes and museums, as well as public or not-for-profit libraries and archives, universities, and government agencies. Some of the sites do not support libraries, properly speaking, lacking staff, policies and procedures, and technical infrastructures; most of these sites do supply accumulated materials to support staff activities. The authors attempted to gather comparable information on types of data gathered to document resources and services and use in strategic planning and management. Because of the wide diversity in size and type of institution in which these libraries operate, the authors did not concern themselves with descriptive data such as volume count or dollar expenditures, but rather with *types* of data collected. The results provide a baseline upon which pre-NARA libraries may begin to analyze local resources and activities, and to evaluate potential areas of growth and change. Finally, a previously-non-existent network may be created to link these agencies commemorating the accomplishments and legacy of 18th, 19th, and early 20th century presidents for future communication and collaboration.

Notes

1. Kimberly Kenney, "Presidential Libraries Outside of the National Archives System," *White House History* 40 (Winter 2016): 17.

2. Fritz Veit, *Presidential Libraries and Collections* (Westport, Ct.: 1987), 135–37.

Appendix 1

President	Institution	Research Library	Contacts: Phone/ E-mail/Visit	Survey: Sent/ Responded
George Washington 1. 1789–1797	George Washington's Mount Vernon Founded 1853 Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington (Library opened 2013)	Y	N/Y/Y	Y/Y
John Adams 2. 1797–1801 AND John Quincy Adams 6. 1825–1829	NPS Adams National Historical Park and Homesite: "Peacefield"	N	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Thomas Jefferson 3. 1801–1809	Thomas Jefferson Foundation Founded 1923 Jefferson Library at Monticello (Library opened 2002)	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
James Madison 4. 1809–1817	James Madison's Montpelier Orange, VA	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
James Monroe 5. 1817–1825	James Monroe's Highland Homesite, Charlottesville, VA	N	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
	AND James Monroe Museum & Memorial Library Fredericksburg, VA	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Andrew Jackson 7. 1829–1837	Hermitage Nashville, TN	N	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
Martin Van Buren 8. 1837–1841	NPS Martin Van Buren National Historic Site Homesite: "Lindenwald" Kinderhook, NY	N	N/Y/N	Y/Y
William Henry Harrison 9. 1841	William Henry Harrison Home Grouseland, and Grouseland Foundation Vincennes, IN	N	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
John Tyler 10. 1841–1845	Sherwood Forest, Home of J.T. Charles City, VA Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation	N	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
James K. Polk 11. 1845–1849	James K. Polk Home & Museum Columbia, TN	N	Y/Y/N	Y/Y

President	Institution	Research Library	Contacts: Phone/ E-mail/Visit	Survey: Sent/ Responded
Zachary Taylor 12. 1849–1850	Zachary Taylor Home (NPS) Louisville, KY private home, not open to the public	N	N/N/N	N/N
Millard Fillmore 13. 1850–1853	Aurora Historical Society Millard Fillmore Presidential site	N	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Franklin Pierce 14. 1853–1857	NPS Franklin Pierce Homestead The Manse, Concord, NH	N	Y/Y/N	Y/N
James Buchanan 15. 1857–1861	NPS James Buchanan Home "Wheatland" Lancaster, PA Administered by Lancaster Historical Society Buchanan Collections	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Abraham Lincoln 16. 1861–1865	Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum Springfield, IL	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
Andrew Johnson 17. 1865–1869	Andrew Johnson National Historic Site (NPS) Tusculum College, Greeneville, TN	N	Y/Y/N	Y/N
Ulysses S. Grant 18. 1869–1877	NPS Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site Homesite: "Whitehaven," St. Louis, MO AND	N	N/N/N	N/N
	Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library US Grant Assoc. at Mississippi State University	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Rutherford B. Hayes 19. 1877–1881	Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, aka Hayes Presidential Library and Museum, Spiegel Grove Homesite, Fremont, OH	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y

President	Institution	Research Library	Contacts: Phone/ E-mail/Visit	Survey: Sent/ Responded
James A. Garfield 20. 1881–1885	James A. Garfield Presidential Site (NPS) Mentor, OH AND	N	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
	Western Reserve Historical Society Garfield collections	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/N
Chester A. Arthur 21. 1885–1889	NPS Chester A. Arthur House New York City, NY privately owned AND	N	N/N/N	N/N
	Arthur Historic Site, Vermont Fairfield, VT	N	Y/Y/N	N/N
Grover Cleveland 22. 1885–1889 AND 24. 1893–1897	Grover Cleveland Home (NPS) Westland, NJ privately owned	N	N/N/N	N/N
	Grover Cleveland Birthplace Princeton, NJ AND	N	N/N/N	N/N
	Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Assoc. Caldwell, NJ			
Benjamin Harrison 23. 1889–1893	Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site Indianapolis, IN	N	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
William McKinley 25. 1897–1901	William McKinley Presidential Library & Museum Canton, OH	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/N
Theodore Roosevelt 26. 1901–1909	Theodore Roosevelt Center/ Presidential Library Dickinson State University Dickinson, ND	Y	Y/Y/Y	Y/Y
William Taft 27. 1909–1913	William Howard Taft Home & Education Center (NPS) Cincinnati, OH	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
Woodrow Wilson 28. 1913–1921	Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library Staunton, VA	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y

President	Institution	Research Library	Contacts: Phone/ E-mail/Visit	Survey: Sent/ Responded
Warren G. Harding 29. 1921– August 1923	Warren G. Harding Home and Memorial (NPS) [new Visitor Center underway that will contain presidential papers, 1,700+ volumes, photographs] CURRENTLY at: Ohio Discovery Center, Columbus, OH	N Y	Y/Y/N N/Y/N	Y/N N/N
Calvin Coolidge 30. 1923–1929	NPS Coolidge Homestead Plymouth, VT AND Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum at the Forbes Public Library, Northampton, MA	N Y	N/N/N Y/Y/N	N/N Y/Y

OTHER:

President	Institution	Research Library	Contacts: Phone/E-mail/Visit	Survey: Sent/ Responded
Jefferson Davis 1861–1865	Beauvoir Jefferson Davis Presidential Home and Library Biloxi, MS	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/N
First Ladies	National First Ladies Library Canton, OH	Y	Y/Y/N	Y/Y
White House	White House Historical Association Washington, DC	Y	Y/Y/N	N/N
SUMMARY **38 Sites / Agencies** **18 WITH research library** supporting **scholarship** **20 with information collections** supporting **staff activities** **29** contacted by **phone** **32** contacted by **e-mail** **11 visited** in person **29 surveys sent** **23 surveys received**				

Appendix 2

Pre-NARA Presidential Libraries & Archives Survey

Dear Colleagues,

We are seeking your in-put on the information resources held at your presidential site. "Information resources" means anything ranging from a formally organized and staffed library and/or archives to informal collections of published and unpublished materials. Uses of these resources may range from support of staff activities such as interpretive programs and website content to production of publications and hosting scholars and teachers conducting research.

The primary focus of our study is the types of data collected at your institution and how this data is used.

We hope that this initial survey will lead to a collaborative network of pre-NARA Presidential sites. Such a group may engender sharing of expertise, experience, and knowledge tools.

1. Name of Institution

2. Founding date

3. Please indicate the type of organization governing your institution

    a. Foundation/Association

    b. Historical Society

    c. Academic Institution

    d. Government Agency

    e. Other (please specify)

4. If your institution is part of a consortium or network please enter name(s):

5. Full Time Equivalent staff working in the library, archive, or information collections (please include professional, technical and support, interns and volunteers in this total)

6. What data relevant to library/archives/information center operations are now gathered?

    a. Number of visitors/readers

    b. Number of school groups

    c. Number of tours/classes offered

    d. Number of visiting scholars/researchers

e. Number of volumes owned: books and journals

f. Number of volumes added

g. Number of volumes used/circulated

h. Number of non-books items owned: graphics, micro forms, ephemera, etc.

i. Number of non-books items added

j. Size of archives/manuscripts collection

k. Number of archives/manuscripts collections processed

l. Number of archives/manuscripts items/folders used

m. Size of digital resource collections: derived from institution's collections

n. Size of digital resource collections from external sources/vendors

o. Number of online searches and/or full-text downloads

p. Number of questions answered—on-site

q. Number of questions answered—online

r. Number of items borrowed from or loaned to other institutions

s. Number of titles published based on your institution's information resources

t. Number of online or physical exhibitions supported with your institution's resources

u. Web traffic to library/archives resources

v. Surveys/users' feedback on library/archives resources and services

w. Budget revenue/expenditure reports

Other (please specify)

7. What data relevant to library/archives/information center operations, do you consider useful for planning, decision making and priority-setting at your institution? (Same choices a–w as question 6)

8. Please indicate how the collected data are applied or used:

a. Accountability to governing board or agency

  b. Annual report

  c. Appraisal of physical infrastructure

  d. Appraisal of technology systems

  e. Benchmarking with other institutions

  f. Budget—appraisal of current year

  g. Budget—preparation of next year

  h. Decision to cancel subscriptions

  i. Decision to suspend fee-based online access

  j. Fund raising

  k. Grant proposals

  l. Marketing and public relations

  m. Review of policies, procedures, workflows

  n. Scope—geographic and volume—of Internet outreach

  o. Staff evaluation—of current personnel

  p. Staff evaluation—recruitment of new personnel

  q. Strategic planning

  r. Year-by-year progress measurement

9. What data are required by the governing organization to which your library/archives reports? Please describe/list:

Are there other data—not currently collected and not listed in this survey—that you think would be useful for planning and decision making? Please describe/list: