

The Members Have Spoken

Results of the LLAMA MAES Survey

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Introduction

The American Library Association (ALA) attracts people who are passionate about libraries and their profession. Once established, committees within the organization can roll along for many years through the sustained efforts of a community of interest. As its name implies, LLAMA's Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation Section (MAES) focuses its interest in the realm of library effectiveness—a subject of importance in both good and bad economic times.

Like other groups within the association, the section functions because of the volunteers who contribute their time and expertise in a variety of capacities. Most volunteers have a choice about where they direct their efforts, and they want to feel that they are making a difference. They also want to know that they are meeting the needs of their constituents—in this case, the members of the section.

A section steeped in assessment should have a good understanding of its membership's needs. But, as is the case with many groups within ALA, the section recognized it was operating with enthusiasm based primarily on informed intuition and anecdotal evidence. During the summer of 2009 we decided to pause and turn to the section's membership with a few questions to make sure we were on the right track. The section's executive committee approved a survey plan and timetable at its January 2010 meeting, and the survey was conducted during April 2010. This article summarizes what we asked and what LLAMA MAES members told us. Their responses, while directed to LLAMA MAES, offer insights that could be useful for other sections as well.

At the time of the survey, membership in LLAMA MAES stood at 1,302 individuals. The section had an executive committee, two committees that developed programs (Data Collection for Library Managers and Using Measurement Data for Library Planning, Assessment and Communication), and a discussion group that convened at both ALA Midwinter and Annual meetings.

With the assistance of the LLAMA Office, email invitations were sent to all 1,260 MAES members with valid email addresses as of March 2010 on behalf of then-MAES Chair Meg Scharf. The survey was conducted over a three-week period (March 29–April 16, 2010) using SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Due to the cost to LLAMA of sending bulk emails, MAES members received two emails: an invitation to participate and a reminder during

the last week of the survey. We received 253 responses to the survey, reflecting a response rate of just over 20%, and respondents were frank in offering their opinions.

The section's executive committee would like to thank everyone who participated. We know that responding to a survey takes time, but respondents can be assured that we have already used the results and will continue to do so to inform the section's future offerings. In the following summary, "LLAMA MAES" or "MAES" are used interchangeably to refer to the section, while "MAE" refers to measurement, assessment, and evaluation topics in general.

Profile of Respondents

Of the survey respondents, 61.4% work in an academic library and 24.9% in a public library. The remaining 13.7% are split among school, special, and state libraries, with a few students and volunteers rounding out the mix. Respondents are spread evenly across the categories presented for size of their total library budget, as shown in Chart One. Their professional responsibility for MAE activities is shown in Chart Two. Surprisingly, more than a third of respondents indicated that they do not have primary responsibility (defined as more than half of one's time) or secondary responsibility (defined as less than half of one's time); they do, however, either use data collected by others or have an interest in the topic. For those with MAE responsibilities, 51% have less than five years of experience and 49% have more than five years.

Chart 1: Size of Library Budget

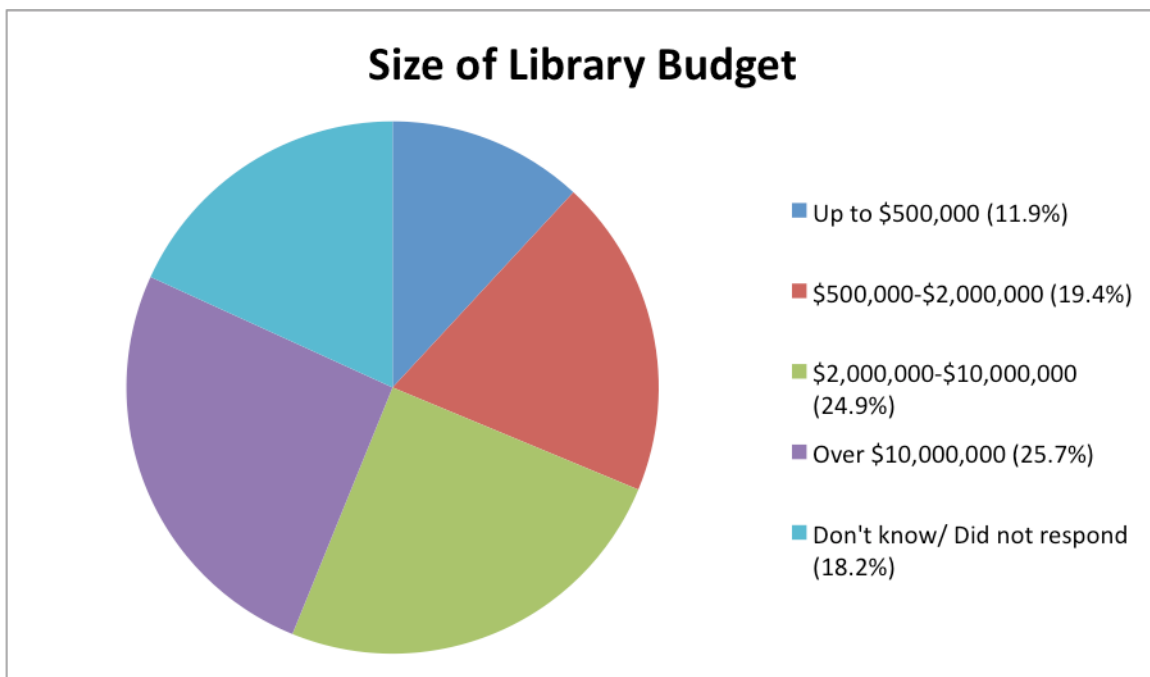
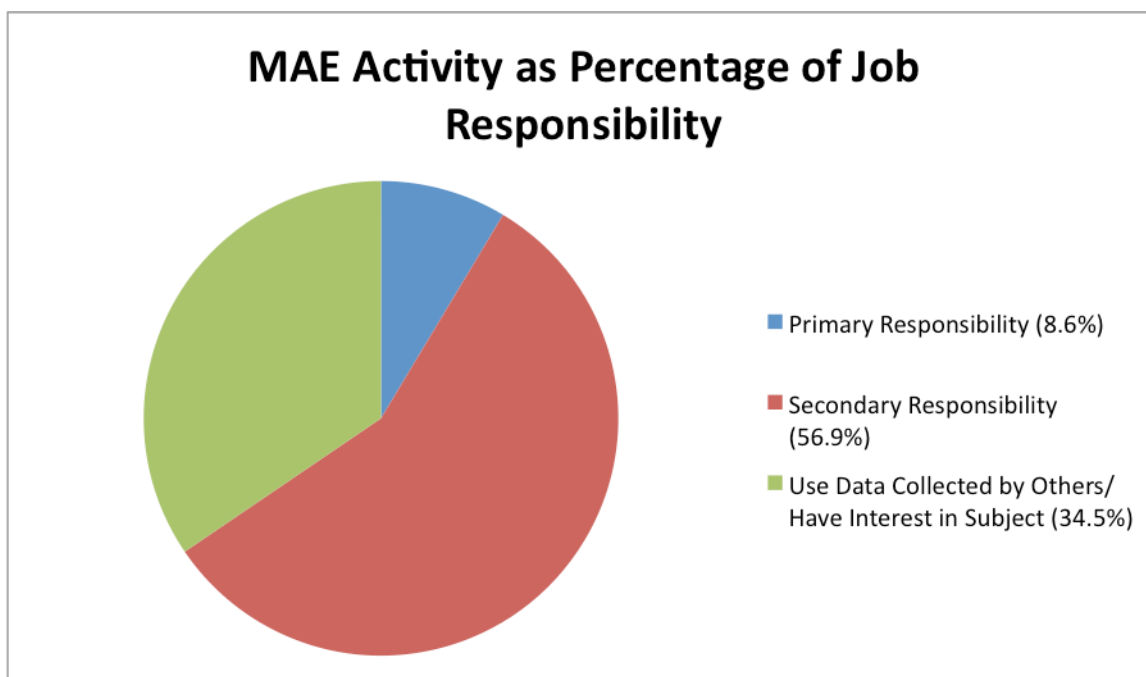


Chart 2: Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation Activity as Percentage of Job Responsibility



Slightly less than half of respondents (46.2%) indicated that they had participated in an activity sponsored by LLAMA MAES (preconference, conference program, discussion group, or committee meeting) over the past three years. Approximately 40% have either served on a LLAMA MAES committee or might be interested in serving at some point in the future, while 60% are primarily interested in becoming more informed about MAE subjects and do not wish to be involved in committee work. This finding may merit further investigation to ascertain that the section has sufficient and well-publicized opportunities for the 40% who want to be involved. For the other 60%, content and content delivery must meet the mark.

Broadly speaking, then, the respondents to the survey are most likely to work in an academic or public library. Relatively few devote the majority of their time to MAE activities, and the group is split down the middle when it comes to years of experience in dealing with MAE activities (more than five years or less than five years). From novices to experts, all respondents are interested in topics related to measurement, assessment, and evaluation—as one might expect given that the survey was targeted to members of LLAMA MAES.

Sources of information—Past and Future

Respondents were asked to designate their three most significant sources of training, education, or information related to MAE topics over the past three years.

Table One lists various sources of information in descending order by the number of participants who rated each source as either first, second, or third in significance (response count). A total

of 215 respondents answered this survey question. Each respondent could rank up to three items. Reading in the professional literature, networking with peers, and attendance at programs during the ALA annual conferences garnered the most responses, with 49.3% indicating that these sources of MAE information were among their top three.

The number of respondents rating each source of information as “most significant” is indicated in parentheses. Looking solely at this subset of 211 selections results in a slightly different ranking, with reading in the professional literature, attendance at programs during ALA annual conference, and attendance at national conferences of ALA divisions emerging as the top choices.

Table 1: Past Sources of Information

Response count (N=616)	Source of information (with number rating that source the most significant)	% of Responses
150	Reading in the professional literature (58)	24.4
89	Networking with peers (18)	14.5
64	Attendance at programs during ALA annual conference (30)	10.4
60	Searching the internet (9)	9.7
57	Attendance at state or local conferences or training sessions (12)	9.3
53	Attendance at national conferences of ALA divisions (PLA, ACRL, etc.) (27)	8.6
52	Webinars or other instruction offered online (15)	8.4
36	Training offered where I work (15)	5.8
29	Attendance at ARL national assessment conferences (20)	4.7
17	Attendance at discussion groups during ALA conferences (4)	2.8
9	Attendance at preconferences/ALA (3)	1.5

This question provided the option for adding sources under “other,” and 28 respondents listed such sources as on-the-job experience, institutes sponsored by the Reference & User Services Association (RUSA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), LLAMA MAES committee meetings, forums and service quality academies offered by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), formal coursework, international conferences, and National Information Standards Organization (NISO) seminars.

Responses to this question suggest that people are relying on a mix of self-initiated activities and programs at conferences to expand their knowledge of MAE subjects. It is instructive that reading in the professional literature received the greatest number of votes both out of the total (24.4%) and out of the “most significant” subset (27.5%). This indicates a strong interest in and need for well-conceived, well-written MAE studies.

From a slightly different perspective, respondents were asked to rate their preferences for how LLAMA MAES could deliver content over the next three to five years, especially in light of budget constraints and personal needs. A total of 251 respondents answered this question and, again, each respondent could rank their top three preferences. Self-paced, web-based tutorials ranked highest with materials added to the Assessment Toolbox on the MAES website (<http://connect.ala.org/node/77838>) and programs at ALA annual conferences rounding out the top three choices and accounting for 55.3% of the responses. In the “most preferred” subset, programs at the ALA annual conference was the most popular option, garnering “votes” from 27.7% of respondents.

Table 2: Future LLAMA MAES training and education

Response count (n=754)	Type of training/education (with number rating most preferred)	Percentage of Responses
147	Self-paced, web-based tutorials (54)	20.0
139	Materials added to the Assessment Toolbox on the MAES website (35)	18.9
120	Programs at ALA annual conference (69)	16.4
116	Webinars (fee-based) (52)	15.8
104	Handouts, bibliographies, conference presentations on the MAES website (18)	14.2
47	Preconference prior to ALA annual conference (11)	6.4
43	Discussion group at ALA midwinter conference (6)	5.9

18	Preconference prior to ALA midwinter conference (4)	2.5
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Thirteen respondents whose votes were not included above expressed preferences for other options. Respondents suggested programs and preconferences at the Public Library Association (4), at regional conferences and state conventions (2), and at the Association of Research Libraries (1). A few (4) specified that webinars should be free in light of tight budgets, and another wanted to participate in a listserv focused on MAE topics. While conference programs remain an important part of the mix, respondents clearly are hoping to see information delivered via the web at little or no cost.

Topics of interest

The survey asked two questions about topics of interest to respondents. When respondents were asked to rate a list of topics as being of high, medium, or low priority over the next three years, they gave the following ratings:

Table 3: Priorities assigned to topics of interest

Topic	Pre-dominant rating	% high	% medium	% low
Value and impact of libraries	High	77.6%	17.3%	5.1%
Return on investment	High	61.5%	30.5%	8.0%
Ways of turning data into outcomes	High	59.3%	32.6%	8.1%
Measures related to learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness	High	50.5%	32.7%	16.8%
User satisfaction data (collecting and using)	High	49.3%	37.3%	13.4%
Developing a culture of assessment	High	48.5%	36.1%	15.3%
Assessment plans	High	46.9%	44.5%	8.6%
Usability studies	Medium	29.8%	52.9%	17.3%
MAE techniques for building collections that meet library goals	Medium	27.5%	46.0%	26.5%
Basic MAE techniques and implementation tips	Medium	35.3%	44.0%	20.3%

E-metrics	Medium	30.0%	41.9%	28.1%
MAE techniques that assist in space planning and design	Medium	26.2%	41.3%	32.5%
Strategic business/performance management tools	Medium	28.8%	40.5%	30.7%
Effective participation in the campus accreditation process	Low	25.0%	25.5%	49.5%

A second related question asked respondents to select three topics in which they would like to receive training over the next few years. As might be expected, respondents' preferences for training track closely to the priorities they assigned to the topics. The top two categories, "value and impact of libraries" and "return on investment," undoubtedly reflect the current economic budget situation and the competition for scarce resources.

Table 4: Topics of interest for training

Response count	Topic
127	Value and impact of libraries
92	Return on investment
83	Ways of turning data into outcomes
61	Measures related to learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness
61	User satisfaction data (collecting and using)
54	Assessment plans
49	Developing a culture of assessment
32	MAE techniques for building collections that meet library goals
31	Strategic business/performance management tools
26	MAE techniques that assist in space planning and design
23	Usability studies
23	Basic MAE techniques and implementation tips

21	E-metrics
19	Effective participation in the campus accreditation process

Adding Value to the MAES membership

Perhaps the most interesting portion of the survey resulted from the open-ended question that asked respondents to identify the “single most important thing MAES could do to add value to my membership in the section.” One hundred and ten people answered this question—offering praise, criticism, and numerous suggestions. The following summary does not purport to be a rigorous content analysis of their opinions, but several broad themes are readily apparent. Comments that touched upon multiple themes were counted accordingly.

By far and away, the largest number of responses (45) can be summarized in one word: information. Webinars, self-paced tutorials, online resources, documentation, and assessment tools are all mentioned frequently. In whatever manner information is delivered, it should be readily accessible and free. Information should be practical, usable, and scalable. People want a site that pulls together best resources, best practices, case studies, helpful statistics, and examples. They want to be informed about cutting-edge developments and the latest literature, and they would also like attention focused on the measurements that matter most.

Several respondents listed specific topics of interest, and these included qualitative assessment, evaluation of outcomes, metrics associated with accreditation, cost savings that can be achieved as a result of assessment activities, the relationship of new generations of technology to assessment, assessment of bibliographic control and technical services (including gauging user satisfaction), public library leadership, higher education trends in assessment and evaluation, assessment techniques used in the corporate world, and assessment of internal organizational communication.

About fourteen people gave a “thumbs up” to the section’s traditional emphasis: conference programs and the discussion group. Among these were strong affirmations, such as “PLEASE continue to offer programs and/or discussion groups” and “continue to provide high quality programming.” Another person felt it was important to continue to feature “vetted (!) high quality providers.” One respondent hoped to see programs offered locally and another suggested that programs should be well publicized in advance. A request for more programming was counterbalanced by a suggestion that the group should sponsor fewer, but better, sessions as a result of collaboration with other units within ALA. One attendee had found a preconference on balanced scorecard organized by LLAMA MAES (June 2008) to be “extremely valuable.”

For another cluster of respondents (13), interacting and networking with peers is the most important reason for being a member of the section. This encompasses both in-person and online opportunities (listserv, a responsive Facebook presence, discussion lists, or newsletters). It might entail collaborative work, having a mentor, or connecting people at the local and regional levels with a model similar to that in place for the Special Libraries Association.

Fifteen people explicitly indicated that they were new to the section and felt they could not provide an informed answer to the question. Some were weighing options in light of the compressed schedule of the conference; one person hoped to see an emphasis on public libraries; and a couple were considering their interests and responsibilities in the context of other divisions within ALA. This group of new members often expressed a desire to learn, such as the person who noted that “I’ve only recently had assessment added to my responsibilities, and look to MAES to help me gain the skills and knowledge necessary for this change.”

Seven comments could be characterized as general observations about LLAMA MAES as a section. Two felt the section is doing a good job; two others wanted to be informed about opportunities for committee membership or to participate as a virtual committee member. A couple of people stated that attendance at MAES committees or programs was difficult because of the lack of travel funds or the compressed conference schedule. Forging a stronger alliance with the Association of Research Libraries was suggested as a course of action for the section. Finally, one person reminded the section of the importance of being “friendly and welcoming” at its meetings.

Communication, or the lack thereof, emerged as an important theme in this open-ended question, with seventeen people making comments along the lines of the following: educate me, keep me informed, make me more aware, contact me, communicate better, communicate directly, communicate more often. “Communicate with me in some way other than this survey,” one person stated. “I don’t know very much at all about what MAES is doing and measurement and evaluation is an important part of my library work.” Several other people shared the sentiment expressed in this response: “I can’t recall receiving any other email from this group except the one for this survey.”

Communications preferences

The survey did provide one question related specifically to communication, in which respondents were asked to indicate their top three preferences for receiving communications from MAES.

Table 5: Preferences for communication

Preference	Response Count	1st	2nd	3rd
Receiving email sent by MAES	180	67.8%	21.7%	10.6%
Articles/updates in LLAMA's quarterly journal <i>LL&M</i>	139	25.2%	41.7%	33.1%
Postings on LIBADMIN Discussion List	96	25.0%	38.5%	36.5%
Postings on <i>Leads from LLAMA</i> News Blog	94	20.2%	34.0%	45.7%

Through ALA Connect	76	25.0%	35.5%	39.5%
Updates/announcements on MAES website	68	13.2%	36.8%	50.0%

While direct e-mail contact is the most popular preference by an order of magnitude, this option presents several challenges. First, a database of e-mail addresses has to be maintained centrally by ALA/LLAMA, because the numbers involved make it too difficult for a volunteer group that changes frequently to keep an accurate and current list. In the course of conducting this survey, the section learned that ALA outsources management of its database. Sending a message to the membership thus involves a fee, making this an option that has to be planned and budgeted through LLAMA.

ALA Connect has settings that would allow members to receive email notifications when new content is posted to the section's site or if they are members of the section. ALA Connect, though, ranked near the bottom of members' communication preferences. This evolving tool is now more robust than it was two years ago at the time of the survey. Whatever barriers exist for Connect need to be addressed and minimized, and this may take a concerted effort that entails links, a clear user guide, and a promotional campaign.

It was heartening to see that LLAMA's quarterly online journal Library Leadership & Management (LL&M) emerged near the top of the list. This is a resource that could be used as a vehicle to raise awareness about LLAMA MAES (as well as other sections), but discussions about desired content will have to take place with the journal's editors.

Utilizing the results of the survey

In initial analyses of the survey results, the section quickly recognized the need to address the issues of content and communication. Fortunately, LLAMA was consciously striving to be more nimble in its organizational structure, and it was relatively easy to revamp LLAMA MAES. The section took the opportunity to revise the charges of its two existing committees and to institute two new ones, resulting in the following committees in addition to the executive committee: Communications (new); Data Collection for Library Managers; Education (new); and Using Measurement Data for Library Planning, Assessment and Communication. The two new committees held their first meetings at the 2012 ALA Midwinter Conference.

This change will allow more people to participate in a MAES committee and provides expanded capacity for meeting the needs of the section. The new committees will be establishing a communication plan for the section and prioritizing educational content that should be developed or highlighted.

Strong programs are important to the section's members, and the section is committed to continuing that service. Since programs are a high priority for ALA Annual meetings, the executive committee decided to hold the discussion group only during the Midwinter meeting

rather than having it compete with the myriad of offerings in the compressed schedule for Annual.

In an ideal world, LLAMA MAES will be a first stop for information that conveys what works in the areas of measurement, assessment, and evaluation—information that is practical, usable, scalable, and reflects best practices. As several respondents suggested, this should be a collaborative endeavor, perhaps based on contributions from committee members who attend conferences, virtual committee members, section members who want to be involved in a project, or a combination of all of these. The responses to the survey convey the message that budgets are tight and that members, now more than ever, are seeking reliable and cost-effective sources of information.

The comments of members new to the section suggest that LLAMA and its sections might consider ways of welcoming and orienting these individuals. Simple things such as a welcoming message from the section, a pool of experienced people willing to share a cup of coffee and answer questions about the section and LLAMA, or a list of projects that could use an extra hand could convey the sense of community that so many members are seeking. This seems even more critical now that LLAMA has moved to an all-section/all-committee meeting format. The sheer number of meetings going on simultaneously can be overwhelming for new members, and even seasoned members are having to learn new strategies for networking and prioritizing their time commitments within and among the LLAMA sections in the current environment.

The section will continue to look at what falls within the domain of the section, the division, and ALA. If Connect remains an issue for members, the problem is larger than the section. In such cases the section can articulate needs, but the ultimate solution may lie beyond the section. Realistically, it may also be difficult to establish a regional presence for the section. But, as several respondents suggested, the section should collaborate whenever possible, and strategic collaborations could be an avenue for taking the LLAMA MAES message on the road.

At upcoming conferences the section committees will continue to discuss the results of the survey in more detail and prioritize a course of action that encompasses information for all and involvement for many. The members have spoken, and the section has a rich source of information to consider. The MAES Executive Committee again thanks all who responded to this inaugural member survey. In order to continue focusing on the MAE educational and training needs of section members and to support the LLAMA Strategic Plan, the section plans to administer an updated survey in spring 2013 and has tentative plans to continue this practice on a three-year cycle. The Executive Committee welcomes additional suggestions related to the section's activities at any time.

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