Learning from Our Members: An MAE Approach

Results of the 2013 LLAMA MAES Survey

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Introduction

LLAMA's Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation Section (MAES) has worked in the past few years to engage its members more fully. As a result of those efforts, MAES is an increasingly active section of LLAMA. MAES' committees have generated programs for ALA, including two programs at the 2014 ALA Annual Conference in Las Vegas. In answer to the demand for more activity outside of conferences, committees have branched out as well into

- maintaining the Assessment Toolbox, available on [ALA Connect](http://connect.ala.org/node/77838) (http://connect.ala.org/node/77838), which includes links to helpful information on assessment, examples of surveys, and other assessment tools;
- developing webinars, such as a summer webinar on assessing space, and a fall webinar on persuasive communication of the results of assessment;
- writing articles, such as the one published in the November 2013 issue of *Library Leadership & Management* on the results of an LIS curricula survey regarding prevalence of assessment/research methods,[1] and the article on core competencies for assessment librarians by Susan Erickson and Sarah Passoneau that also appears in this issue of LL&M; and
- cultivating discussions beyond its discussion group at Midwinter, by advocating use of the newly established MAES email list (maes@ala.org) for continued and more in-depth discussion.

MAES encourages librarians to examine user needs and perceptions to improve services and operations. Therefore, it is appropriate that MAES continues to examine its member needs, perceptions and desires in order to engage members more effectively and to improve the services it provides them through a second membership-wide survey. The first survey was conducted in April 2010, and the results were reported here in *Library Leadership & Management.*[2] After looking carefully at the 2010 survey report, a team of MAES members, with help from the LLAMA MAES Executive Committee, evaluated what MAES had accomplished since then. The review showed that the section had accomplished most of what members had requested, with a few exceptions. Many of the activities described above reflect needs of the members garnered from the survey results.

Using the existing structure from 2010, the team updated the survey using more current language, tools, and applications, revising many of the original questions. Qualtrics was

selected as the platform for administering the survey since all of the co-authors had some level of familiarity with the tool and could be added as survey "collaborators" on the home institution (Virginia Tech) Qualtrics site. The team consulted heavily with the Executive Committee on language, number and format of questions, response options, and invitation message. Institutional Review Board approval was sought and granted through Virginia Tech.

The survey was sent to the LLAMA MAES membership via email messages to the 998 MAES members' addresses in November 2013. The survey was open for three weeks, garnering 199 respondents. Of those, 142 completed the survey, yielding a completion rate of approximately 14%. This compares to a response rate of almost 20% (253 of 1260) in 2010. Results of the survey are presented below.
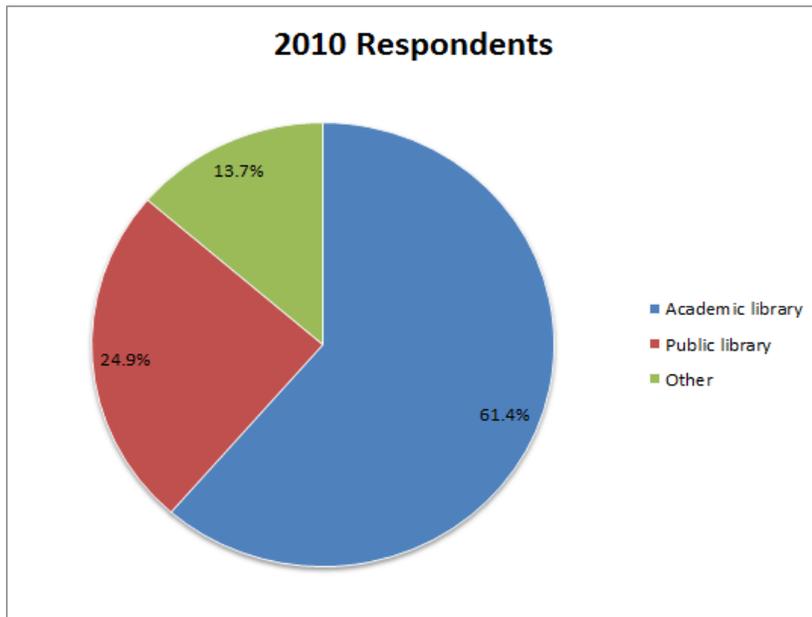
Profile of Survey Respondents

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents (72.7%; n=101) work in an academic library, an 18.4% increase over this group's representation of 61.4% (143) in the 2010 survey. The proportion of respondents working in a public library fell from 24.9% (58) in 2010 to 21.6% (30) in 2013. Just eight individuals, or approximately 6% of respondents, indicated that they work at state libraries or agencies, medical or health sciences libraries, library or information sciences schools, or associations, or as a researcher or consultant. In 2013, nearly 14% (32) of respondents selected one of these categories or indicated that they were students or volunteers. Charts 1 and 2 show the composition of responses by type of employer in 2010 and 2013. Even though the proportion of public librarians who participated in the survey dropped slightly from 2010 to 2013, the authors' experience seems to indicate that this is a larger proportion of public librarians than usually attend MAES programs, discussion groups, and committee meetings at ALA annual conferences and mid-winter meetings. This continues to be an underserved group that MAES should target for increased programming and services.

Chart 1: 2013 Survey Respondents by Type of Library
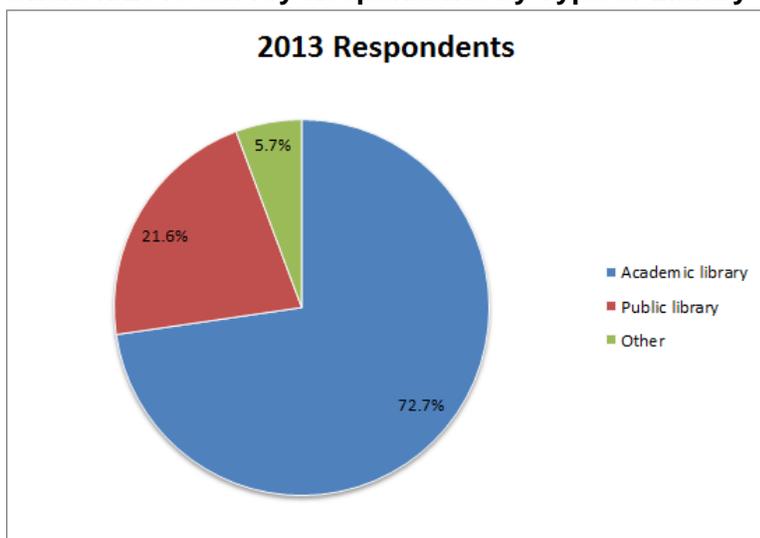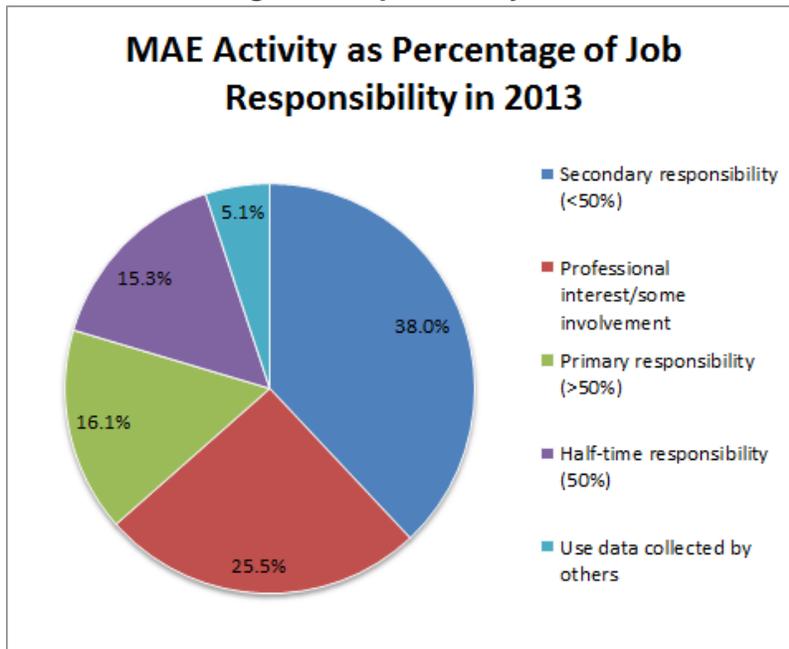
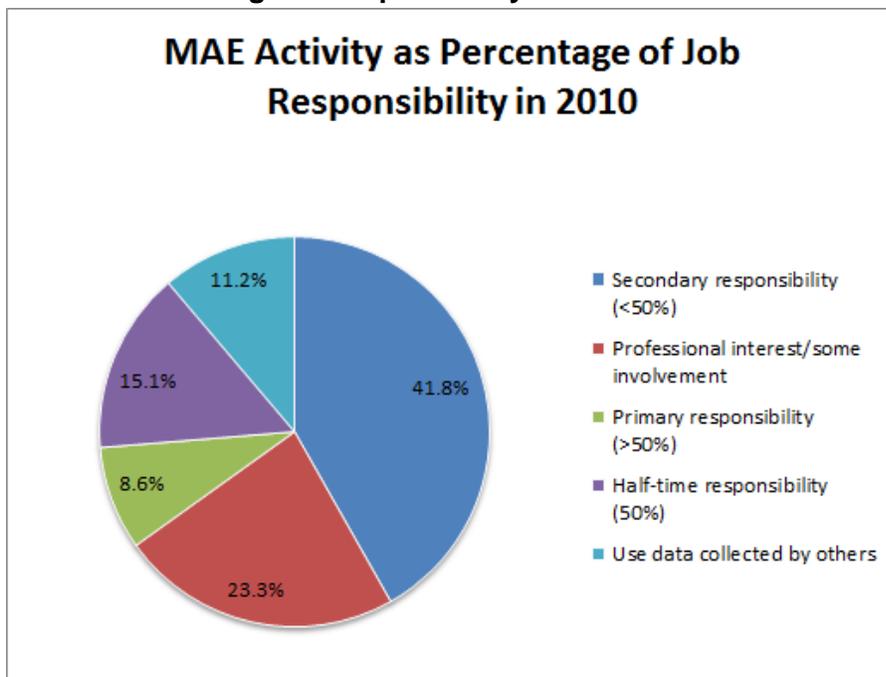**Chart 2: 2010 Survey Respondents by Type of Library**

Survey respondents' responsibilities for measurement, assessment and evaluation (MAE) activities are shown in Charts 3 and 4. Although the number of respondents is similar, the percentage of respondents who indicated that they had primary responsibility for MAE activity nearly doubled from 2010 to 2013, from 8.6% (n=20) to 16.1% (n=22). This may reflect the increased importance of these activities at all types of libraries. In addition to its primary audience of librarians who have some degree of responsibility for measurement, assessment and evaluation activities, MAES continues to draw significant membership from librarians who use data collected by others or who are interested in the area. This may indicate a need for programming and resources aimed at a more general audience as well as at specialists in the field. Of respondents who indicated that they have MAE responsibilities, 58.4% (n=73) of the respondents have fewer than five years of experience while 41.6% (n=52) have more than five years. By comparison, the 2010 survey found that 51% (n=78) had fewer than five years of experience, while 49% (n=75) had more than five years. A cross-tabulation of responses from public librarians in 2013 showed that this group had an even higher percentage of respondents (65.4%; n=17) with fewer than five years of experience. The results may reflect the creation of more entry or mid-level assessment positions, particularly in public libraries, since the 2010 survey.

Chart 3: Percentage of Responsibility for MAE Activities in 2013 Respondents

MAE Activity as Percentage of Job Responsibility in 2013

- Secondary responsibility (<50%): 38.0%
- Professional interest/some involvement: 25.5%
- Primary responsibility (>50%): 16.1%
- Half-time responsibility (50%): 15.3%
- Use data collected by others: 5.1%

Chart 4: Percentage of Responsibility for MAE Activities in 2010 Respondents

MAE Activity as Percentage of Job Responsibility in 2010

- Secondary responsibility (<50%): 41.8%
- Professional interest/some involvement: 23.3%
- Primary responsibility (>50%): 8.6%
- Half-time responsibility (50%): 15.1%
- Use data collected by others: 11.2%

Results

In 2010 and again in 2013, respondents were asked to designate their three most significant sources of training, education, or information related to MAE topics over the preceding three years, although they were not exactly parallel. In 2010, reading in the professional literature, networking with peers, and attendance at programs during ALA annual conference garnered the most responses. In 2013, more than half of the respondents identified the following sources as most significant: attendance at conferences, meetings or forums of any association; staying abreast of trends in the profession; and learning by doing. "Webinars or other online instruction" was selected as a significant source of training, education or information for 43% of respondents, a fivefold increase over 2010, when only 8.4% of respondents selected this as one of their top three sources. Networking with peers dropped from second in 2010 to fifth in 2013, although this may have been due in part to the inclusion of emails and blogs in a different item. Table 1 provides more details about the 2013 results for this item.

Table 1: Past Significant Sources of MAE Information

Response count (N=473)	Most significant sources of training, education, and information	% of Respondents Selecting an Item (N=163)
126	Conferences, meetings, or forums of any association	77
89	Staying abreast of trends in the profession (e.g. through blogs, journals, emails, etc.)	55
88	Learning by doing	54
70	Webinars or other online instruction	43
59	Networking with peers	36
23	Coursework or continuing education	14
12	Training offered where I work	7
6	Other	4

Respondents were asked to list the non-LLAMA MAES conferences, meetings or forums at which they had acquired information about MAE topics. This question was asked for several reasons, including identifying other MAE educational venues, groups with which to collaborate, and events at which it would be beneficial to have a MAES presence. Sources named most often were the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Library Assessment Conference as well as its service quality academies and forums, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Assessment Discussion Group as well as ACRL conferences and other events, Evidence Based Library and Information Practice conferences, the Southeastern Library Assessment Conference, American Evaluation Association conferences, Public Library

Association conferences, state and regional conferences and meetings, Library Journal webinars, and EDUCAUSE conferences.

Respondents were also asked to give their top three preferences for accessing training and education offered by LLAMA MAES over the next three to five years, in the context of the economy and other factors that might impact their professional learning. Free online training such as videos and recorded presentations ranked highest, selected by 71% of respondents. The LLAMA MAES Assessment Toolbox, which contains general assessment links and tools used by other institutions, was the second most popular choice, selected by 50% of respondents. The Toolbox is a grassroots effort and is only as relevant, thorough and timely as members make it. LLAMA MAES members are encouraged to upload materials to the Toolbox through ALA Connect. Programs at ALA conferences, fee-based webinars, and the MAES email list were selected as top preferences by at least 30% of respondents. Receiving email sent by MAES was the most preferred communication mechanism in the 2010 survey, and the MAES email list was established in response. The 2013 survey results reinforce the popularity of this method of communication and also for using it to access training and education. Complete results for this survey item are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Preferred Sources of MAE Information in the Future

Response count (N=415)	Preferences for accessing future LLAMA MAES training and education	% of Respondents Selecting an Item (N=141)
100	Free online training (e.g., videos, recorded presentations, etc.)	71
71	Materials in LLAMA MAES Assessment Toolbox (includes general assessment links, assessment tools used by other institutions, etc.	50
68	Programs at ALA conference	48
52	Fee-based Webinars	37
44	MAES email list	31
26	LLAMA MAES blog (similar to Leads for LLAMA blog, but with MAE focus)	18
20	Discussion groups at ALA Midwinter Meeting	14
16	Preconferences prior to ALA conference	11
16	LLAMA MAES invited speakers at non-LLAMA events (e.g. for a program at PLA, SLA, ACRL, etc.)	11
2	Other (suggestions were to expand the Toolbox and to offer free webinars)	1

Respondents were further asked to choose three topics for training that were particularly important to them. The three most important training topics in 2010 were value and impact of libraries (54%), return on investment (39.1%), and ways of turning data into outcomes (35.3%). In 2013, MAES members responded similarly, but rated a newly worded item — MAE techniques for improving services to users/user needs assessment — as most important (32%). This was followed by value and impact of libraries and ways of turning data into outcomes, which were each selected by 30% of respondents. Return on investment was selected by only 13% of respondents in 2013.

Table 3: Most Significant Training Needs

Response count (N=302)	Most significant needs for training	% of Respondents Selecting an Item (N=145)
47	MAE techniques for improving services to users/user needs assessment	32
43	Value and impact of libraries	30
43	Ways of turning data into outcomes	30
42	Assessment plans	29
38	Collecting and using user satisfaction data	26
36	Developing a culture of assessment	25
33	Measures related to learning outcomes and teaching	23
30	Data visualization techniques	21
22	MAE techniques for building collections that meet library goals	15
21	MAE techniques assist in space planning and design	14
19	Return on Investment	13
19	Strategic business/ performance management tools	13
17	Basic MAE tools and tips	12
16	Measures related to research productivity including Altmetrics (new metrics based on the Social Web for analyzing, and informing scholarship)	11
4	Usability studies	3
3	Other (including institutional plans, impact assessment for more than libraries, and "all of the above")	2

Other connections to LLAMA and MAES

Survey respondents are incredibly active in their fields. 105 responses were recorded to the survey question on this topic. Most of the respondents are involved with multiple LLAMA sections, and also are involved in other ALA related groups such as ACRL and LITA, as well as with ARL. The table below represents all of the responses.

Table 4: Respondents' Involvement with Other Groups

Response count (N=219)	Involvement with other LLAMA sections or MAES groups	% of Respondents Selecting an Item (N=105)
56	LLAMA Library Organization and Management Section	53
32	ACRL Assessment Discussion Group	30
29	ARL Library Assessment Forum	28
25	LLAMA Human Resources Section	24
24	LLAMA Building & Equipment Section	23
21	LLAMA Systems and Services Section	20
14	LLAMA Fund Raising and Financial Development Section	13
13	LLAMA Public Relations and Marketing Section	12
5	Other (Data Collection for Library Managers, LITA Assessment, Quality Partnerships, LibQUAL discussion list, Communications)	5

Adding Value to the MAES membership

One of the richest data sets for MAES came from the open-ended question which asked what MAES could do to add value to membership. Sixty-four people responded to this question with many suggestions falling into six main categories. Twenty-five of these responses discussed training. Suggestions such as more webinars, workshops led by recognized assessment experts, access to consultants, and programming at conferences were mentioned multiple times. Members also requested interactive training, both online and face-to-face, as well as conference programs and webinars.

Members want MAES to be more visible and interactive. Sixteen respondents made comments such as "be more visible," "maintain an interactive presence throughout the year," and "this is

the first time I remember receiving anything from/about MAES." Respondents also requested that MAES "promote awareness," "advertise group events," "take a leadership role in impact assessment," and "keep reminding us of available resources." More active use of the MAES email list will address many of these requests.

Ten of the responses requested that MAES better promote the Assessment Toolbox and use it to provide more information about "best practices and standards for assessment," "tools, reports and techniques," as well as more information concerning "data-driven assessment" and navigating "all the information about assessment that is out there." The Assessment Toolbox is a potential growth area for MAES, both in terms of content and marketing.

Networking and mentoring were also mentioned in the responses. Comments suggested that MAES should "provide opportunities for members to lead and serve," "list consultants able to provide assistance with (MAES)," "mentor older MLS students," and "collaborate programming with other ALA divisions." In short, respondents want more ways to collaborate with colleagues across ALA and across the country without having to travel to conferences.

In today's economy, it is no surprise that cost is a concern for many of our respondents. Seven people mentioned the cost of travel, webinars, or annual dues as a barrier to engaged participation, suggesting that MAES "not require extra cost (preconference charges, extra fees to join)," "offer free online training on all the topics listed in this survey," and "lower the cost of webinars."

Finally, two members requested a greater focus on public library assessment work, suggesting that MAES "develop more tools for public libraries" and include these tools in the Toolbox. One person asked for help marketing their personal consultation business. Two others asked MAES to "follow up on the suggestions from this survey" and to "keep doing what you are doing," suggesting that asking members for their input is valuable for both the section and for members.

Using the Results of the Survey

The LLAMA MAES Executive Committee has already taken a variety of actions and has begun planning for the future based directly on results of the survey. For example, many of the MAES members attend several different assessment conferences. The executive committee has begun plans to make MAES more visible at these events, through informal happy hours or "dining with MAES members" opportunities. They also plan to make MAES brochures available at these conferences, or perhaps provide stock slides about MAES that members can incorporate into their own presentations. This would also have the advantage of reaching members who are able to attend regional events as well as offer networking opportunities to librarians who work in assessment.

The committees of MAES will be using the survey data to follow up on the most important training needs by planning programs, webinars and/or preconferences that align with members'

desires for training. Additionally, MAES leadership expects to actively focus on training formats that are free, to supplement those that incur additional costs for members.

As a result of the 2010 survey, the MAES email list (maes@ala.org) was created and members have been encouraged to sign up since the summer of 2013. To maintain an interactive presence throughout the year, committees will promote programs, webinars, articles, and other valuable information on that list, as well as encourage discussion of issues of concern to MAES members. Additionally, MAES leadership will strive to increase publicity for MAES activities and events; for example, by providing regular news items to American Libraries Direct. These efforts will make MAES more visible to both its members and others who have interest in measuring or assessing library services.

Gaps in MAES activities uncovered through the survey, such as identifying consultants who can provide assistance with measurement, assessment and evaluation; ensuring that public library perspectives are incorporated into programs, webinars and other activities; and outreach to library schools to enable more explicit mentoring of future leaders in MAE, will be given high priority for immediate future action. MAES leadership will also share the results of this survey with the full LLAMA Board to become part of its strategic planning.

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