

2018

Project Summary

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Citation Details

Castek, J., Jacobs, G., Gibbon, C., Frank, T., Honisett, A., Anderson, J., (2018). Project Summary. Advancing Digital Equity in Public Libraries: Assessing Library Patrons' Problem Solving in Technology Rich Environments.

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Advancing Digital Equity in Public Libraries: Assessing Library Patrons' Problem Solving in Technology Rich Environments

Project Summary

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant # LG-06-14-076-14A.

Project Purpose: The purpose of the research was to examine and understand the digital problem solving processes of vulnerable adults.

Project Team: This research was a collaborative effort with contributions made by a core team of researchers and practitioners at Portland State University, the University of Arizona, and staff from the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon. The research team was advised by a National Advisory Committee and an external evaluator.

Data Collection: The research used a mixed methods design that included 1) a background survey (N=450); 2) PIAAC's Problem Solving in Technology Rich Environments (PSTRE) assessment (N=211), and 3) an observation and interview of participants completing the PSTRE and a set of online library tasks the research team designed (N=18).

Analysis: Quantitative analysis included 1) basic demographics; 2) comparisons between groups of participants, and 3) a latent class analysis. Qualitative analysis was used to develop the themes that were examined in relation to the quantitative results.

Findings and Outcomes: Quantitative analysis revealed that library website use was a strong predictor of PSTRE scores. Qualitative analysis showed that digital problem solving needs to be seen as a set of contexts and events that are dynamic across different situations.

The project resulted in two products: 1) a design protocol with tasks for observing digital problem solving in the library and 2) an observational checklist to use when a librarian or other library staff member meets with a patron or within the context of a class.

Suggested Citation: Castek, J., Jacobs, G., Gibbon, C., Frank, T., Honisett, A., Anderson, J., (2018). *Project Summary*. Advancing Digital Equity in Public Libraries: Assessing Library Patrons' Problem Solving in Technology Rich Environments.

The authors acknowledge contributions by Vailey Oehlke and Patricia Moran at Multnomah County Library, and Matt Timberlake at Multnomah County IT, members of the grant's advisory board as well as research collaborators Mei-kuang Chen, Stephen Reder, Andrew Pizzolato, and Laura Hill for their many contributions.



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