Presentations and Publications

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

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Project Summary

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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.