

2009-2010 Library & MeL Study

Introduction:

In 2009-2010, the Library of Michigan contracted with EPIC MRA to conduct a study about Michigan residents' use and perceptions of libraries. EPIC MRA looked at people who use Michigan libraries, their reasons for doing so, and the frequency of their use. They also looked at resident's knowledge and use of the MeL components: the databases, MeLCat, Michigan Online Resources for Educators (MORE) and Michigana. The study comprised three parts: an online survey for patrons, an online survey for staff, and a 12-minute phone interview of randomly selected Michigan residents. The surveys were conducted in the fall of 2009 and the data analysis was completed over the winter of 2010.

The Library of Michigan funds the Michigan eLibrary with Library Services & Technology Act (LSTA) funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). IMLS encourages evaluation of LSTA funded programs to comply with federal law, to provide information for good program decision-making, and to help communicate the value of a program

The first survey was a random phone survey of the general public. We wanted to know what the general public, many of whom may not be library users, thought about libraries and MeL. The survey of 600 people garnered responses from all 83 counties and gave us a good overview of how aware of libraries services people are and what they think of them.

The second survey was an online survey of library patrons. We asked libraries of all types around the state to promote the survey to their users and we received a tremendous response. While this survey was not random, as it required users to come into the library or use the library website in order to learn about it, we received enough responses to give us a good range of responses from library users of all library types in all counties about what value they place on various services and what they think of their libraries and MeL. In total, 2,268 people responded to the online survey of library patrons.

The third survey was an online survey of library staff. We again asked libraries of all types to promote the survey to their staff and again received a tremendous response. Library staff from academic, public, public and private K-12 schools and special libraries all responded to the survey. They told us what they think about their libraries, MeL and the public use of these resources. In total, 737 library staff members responded to the online survey of library staff.

Highlights:

Of the 600 randomly selected Michigan residents who were interviewed by phone, here are some highlights of the report:

- In this random phone survey, 1 in 5 respondents were aware of MeL and 37% of those had actually used it. Of those who had used MeL, 50% reported they had used MeL between 6 and 10 times in the past year.
- 80% of respondents reported visiting a library in the past two years. Most who reported visiting a library did so at least twice a month. One third of these people reported using the Internet at the library. Doing research (29%) and homework (15%) were the top two reasons for using library computers.
- The top reported reason for not using computers at a library in the previous two years was that they had a computer at home; 69% report that they don't feel as comfortable using a library computer as they do using a computer at home or work.
- The second and third reasons for not visiting a library in the past two years were: 11% no time and 9% no need.
- Only 2% reported that they asked a librarian or staff for assistance.
- There was an 84% total positive rating for MeL.

EPIC MRA assessed 2,868 library users via a self-selected online survey about their attitudes toward libraries and experiences of the Michigan eLibrary.

- When online survey respondents were asked the primary reasons that they used a library their number one answer was borrowing books. Over all, 94% of respondents had a total positive view of their library.
- 92% reported that they had no concerns regarding entering their driver's license number or library card number to access MeL databases.
- The top reasons for using the MeL Databases include: 39% doing research or homework, 16% genealogy, 15% consumer health and 10% business research. 57% of those surveyed were able to find what they were looking for using the MeL databases all or nearly all of the time.
- 84% of these online users were aware of MeLCat. 56% used MeLCat "a lot" and 27% used it "some." Reasons for using MeLCat were reported as 62% for recreational reading.
 - 73% said they found all or nearly all of what they needed on MeLCat.
 - 56% of respondents said that their expectation was that library materials would arrive in 7-8 days.

EPIC MRA also surveyed 737 self-selected library staff members via an online survey about their attitudes toward libraries and knowledge of the Michigan eLibrary.

- Library staff was asked by their personal observation or by library records which parts of the Michigan eLibrary patrons used most frequently. 36% of staff said the databases and 61% said MeLCat.
 - However, patrons reported that in the past two years they had most frequently used the databases (37%) and MeLCat (36%) in that order; 4% said MORE, 9% Michigana, and 13% used the Gateways.

- 80% of patrons reported accessing the databases from their homes or offices. 19% reported accessing them at the library, 1% of survey participants reported that they do not use the databases.
- 97% of library staff gave MeL an over-all positive rating.
- 85% said they encouraged the use of MeL databases. It is interesting to compare this to the 2% of library patrons who reported that they asked a librarian for assistance (in general).
- 73% of library staff reported no problems loaning AV materials as a result of participating in MeLCat.
- 62% of library staff said libraries were more important due to computers and the Internet while 40% of the general public held same opinion. 50% of library users said they were about the same.

An important point revealed by this study is that unmediated library services, such as the MeL databases, are highly valued and used by patrons. However, patrons frequently use these services without staff assistance. Patrons are using these services in ways that are not readily visible, but are nevertheless important to good community service.

Additional Reports:

All three surveys included demographic data such as age, race, family type (with children/without children), area of the state, and level of education. In addition to the Final Report on all three surveys that EPIC MRA prepared, we also have frequency and cross-tabulation reports for the surveys and a list of home libraries listed by the respondents in the online patron survey and the online library staff survey.

Anyone that would like to deep dive the data to see the responses from their area may contact Karren Reish at reishk@michigan.gov or 517-241-0021 to receive an electronic copy.

We would like to thank everyone for his or her assistance in this project. We have learned a great about what Michigan residents think about their libraries and MeL with your help.