3.0 RESULTS OF IN-DEPTH EVALUATIONS

3.1 *FloriNet*

The Division found itself at a critical junction in the years just prior to 1997. As technology to support the Internet improved, Congress decided that the long-standing federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grant program needed an update.

This update became a new federal grant program, the LSTA, which placed a strong emphasis on information access through technology and improving access to library services for those having difficulty using a library or those underserved. FloriNet, a program that had as its main mission to assist Florida's public libraries in providing graphical Internet access to all Florida residents, was the Division's primary vehicle to implement the federal vision of enhancing information access through technology. The Division's objective was reflected in the long-range plan, "Access for All: Libraries in Florida's Future" *(Access for All):* "95% of public library outlets will have direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web by 1998." FloriNet also provided for training that would allow the access to be used by librarians and the public in a more efficient and effective manner. FloriNet's third component is the development of on-line content.

FloriNet did not arise suddenly. By March 1994, the Florida Library Network Council, through the Network Planning Task Force, had already identified the direction that electronic information transfer would move library services. In keeping with the previous direction put forth in the Florida Resource Sharing Plan, FloriNet was envisioned as a means of providing greater amounts of information to a larger segment of the population.

By December 1996, the Division was ready to sponsor a series of workshops to help local libraries prepare for the successful implementation of online information

delivery. The Division helped local libraries by answering relevant technical questions and helping local libraries map out a plan for successful implementation. By helping local libraries adopt the vision of networked library services, The Division became a key resource in helping sell the idea of FloriNet across the state.

Beyond the vision provided by the Division, several fortuitous events occurred at roughly the same time and contributed to the great success of FloriNet. One factor was the tremendous impact felt throughout the state's libraries when the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) became the provider for statewide Internet connectivity. FIRN allowed many public libraries with the gateway to the Internet by providing the dial-in features required for electronic communication. This saved public libraries considerable funds that could be directed to other programs.

Another significant factor was the impact of the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the resulting e-rate that gave schools and libraries the capability of providing infrastructure that could support Internet activity at a substantially reduced rate. This included acquisition and maintenance of network components and saved public libraries millions of dollars statewide. Additionally, funds for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were made available to subsidize the recurring costs of Internet access.

A third significant factor came later in the form of the contributions of hardware, software, training and content by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grants. This infusion of more than $10 million into Florida's libraries completed the Internet public access picture by providing local libraries with training and some additional content to display on their web sites.

FloriNet was more than just infrastructure, hardware, and software. Libraries also used FloriNet grants for:

- Information content and services: Libraries developed comprehensive Web pages that guided patrons to relevant local

information and presented an organized approach to the vast array of worldwide information; and

■ Training support: Libraries used a variety of methods to ensure that citizens would have the support of trained staff when utilizing information services. Staff training was conducted by the six multitype library cooperatives. Quite often training was done in a "train the trainer" approach, so key staff could return to the local library and provide training for other staff. In some library systems, staff utilized local training options; i.e., through a community college or local commercial vendor.[1]

Of the 152 LSTA funded grants awarded in 1997 by the Division, 105 (69%) contained FloriNet in the grant's title, and several more had monies identified for Web page development or other associated activities. This continued into the 1998 grant cycle, but not at the same high level as the 1997 awards. This emphasis on hardware and software during the first two years of the LSTA program was necessary to successfully fulfill the primary FloriNet mission of bringing public libraries into the era of the Internet and World Wide Web.

Once the primary FloriNet mission was achieved, FloriNet became less conspicuous as a designated program. The reason for this is that the FloriNet program was ultimately a catch-all name for the public and library communities so they could grasp the basic concept of online library service. Eventually, after libraries were connected to the Internet and operational, the intent of the program was to customize online service to local community needs. Eventually these grant applications encompassed training and content requests that did not always directly relate to FloriNet.

FloriNet began shifting more towards the training and content segments of the program in 1998 and 1999 as the hardware and software infrastructure component became complete. Obviously librarians and the public needed effective training to work

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[1] Promising Practices/Exemplary Programs; Florida Program; Division of Information and Library Services; 1998.

with the new access to the Internet and technology in general. The Division began shifting grant focus to content in late 1998 and 1999 as the training became inclusive of a high percentage of sites and personnel around the state. Training and content grants remain the majority of LSTA funds through 1999 and up to current awards.

One of the more difficult aspects of evaluating FloriNet is that the term FloriNet disappeared from many grant applications as the years progressed. Training for other programs such as literacy occurred but was not associated with FloriNet. Training for Internet use grants and content development grants were awarded but did not include the term FloriNet. In many cases, grants were awarded for multiple purposes. A typical grant summary might include the conversion of source material to digital format, purchase and installation of library automation hardware and software, and providing access to the digitized material via the Web. Some of the funds awarded in this case were obviously in line with FloriNet goals and part was for other programs. Thus, the total of funds expended exclusively for FloriNet can not be determined from the Division's data. This overlap across programs shows an efficient integration but does make the evaluation of FloriNet as a stand-alone program difficult to complete.

As stated above, FloriNet was the program in place that was responsible for the Division attaining the "95% of public library outlets will have direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web by 1998" objective.

The impact of FloriNet was considerable, especially for the small and rural libraries that had little or no current reference resources. Access to the Internet afforded these libraries the ability to provide public access to tremendous amounts of information previously found only in larger, well-funded libraries. Patrons now had a mechanism to access all types of informational databases as well as other information sources and encyclopedias.

Before the term "digital divide" was coined, FloriNet was bringing the public libraries to the community forefront as a resource that provided free Internet access for the general public. Combined with the staff training component and organization of information that Web pages brought, public libraries became centers of activity because patrons knew they could get information they needed for any endeavor.

Today, libraries have policies limiting computer time because so many people need access, and insufficient resources exist to provide unlimited access. As the Internet and World Wide Web have grown exponentially, this service is more popular than ever. Students can supplement their school research at libraries. Foreign visitors and immigrants can communicate with loved ones worldwide for free. Life-long learners can continue their education from any community in which they choose to reside that has a public library. Professionals can seek better employment. In short, free public access to information is one of the primary tools to further democracy, and the public libraries have positioned themselves squarely at the forefront in providing these tools.

Many library directors have felt the need to add more workstations because of the considerable amount of time patrons spent waiting to use a terminal. In one case, patrons were experiencing an average wait time of 45 minutes to an hour. To address the issue, the library added additional workstations, thus decreasing the average wait time to 15 minutes.[2]

In addition to increasing the number of workstations in libraries, many have felt a need to hold workshops on effective Internet use. These workshops also assisted in decreasing the amount of time patrons spent waiting for a terminal because individuals were able to find the data they needed more quickly, eliminating needless searches.

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[2] Data collected from annual grant reports.

Additional workshops that libraries prepared for patrons and library staff included workshops in PC maintenance and troubleshooting, the use of specific software packages provided by the different libraries (e.g. Microsoft Office), and on-line resources available through various databases across the state.

From information obtained in the 1998–1999 *Florida Library Directory with Statistics*, 2,746 staff terminals and 2,940 public terminals are currently in place throughout libraries and library cooperatives. In addition, libraries recorded 21,713,633 Web site hits across the state.

3.2   FloriNet Findings

The FloriNet program had one primary and two secondary components at inception. The primary component was:

- Providing direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web.

The secondary components were:

- Training for librarians and the public that would allow access to on-line information; and

- The development of on-line content.

Assessment of the successful attainment of these goals is complicated by the evolution of FloriNet over the past several years. While FloriNet began as a specific program with clear delineation in the grant process, over time the program lost much of its unique identity. Grant applications for training and online content were often not specifically designated as FloriNet related. Therefore, the last two components listed above are not usually specifically associated with the FloriNet program. Given this proviso, our findings are listed below.

FloriNet Objective 1: Provide direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web for Florida's public libraries.

The evaluation method was to count annually the number of public libraries that have full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web.

FINDING

FloriNet was the program in place that was responsible for the Division being able to attain a 95 percent success rate for having direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web by 1998. Therefore, **this objective was accomplished**.

FloriNet Objective 2 : Provide training for librarians and the public that would allow access to on-line information.

The evaluation method was to determine if training was provided by all six multitype library cooperatives and over 50 percent of survey respondents indicated that training was a significant impact of the LSTA funding program.

FINDING

All six multitype cooperatives did provide training that would allow access to on-line information. Additionally, 64 percent of survey respondents indicated that training was a significant impact of the LSTA program. Therefore, **this objective was accomplished**.

FloriNet Objective 3: Develop on-line content for Florida's public libraries.

The evaluation method was to determine if the number of databases offered to the public libraries increased each year.

FINDING

The number of databases offered did not increase each year. Although the number of available electronic databases decreased, those databases remaining are the most appropriate for public libraries. **This objective was not accomplished.**

Our evaluation of the FloriNet program shows that overall the program has been extremely successful in providing Web/Internet access and training for library staff and the public. The objective of providing on-line content was somewhat ambiguous; however, progress towards this objective clearly lags behind the other two. This is not surprising given that provision of content was the final phase in a three-phased plan. As planned, the Division did not aggressively move towards this objective until 1999;

therefore, it is not surprising that progress has been somewhat limited. Additionally, the measure of content provision is somewhat incomplete, and may not in fact truly capture all the work that has been done in this area. This is especially true given the intended purpose of having local libraries customize content to meet community demands.

Ultimately, the FloriNet concept has to be considered a major success. The primary mission was to bring the Florida public library system into the electronic information age. Without question, this has occurred and was done very quickly. At the time that FloriNet was originated, only 20 percent of all public libraries had Internet access. Internet access in the public libraries is now nearly universal. The combination of LSTA funds (hardware & software), FIRN (access to the Internet), the e-rate (subsidized telecommunications, ISP and Internet connections) and the Gates foundation (hardware, networking, software, training & content) allowed the State Library System to bring over 95 percent of public libraries online. Additionally, Over $28 million was spent to accomplish this goal, virtually none of which came from legislative appropriation. While several fortuitous events occurred to facilitate the process, the Division is to be commended for taking advantage of these opportunities and incorporating them into its overall plan. Future challenges, such as bandwidth issues and space considerations (i.e., most libraries have installed all the computers they have room for), will need to be addressed with similar forward thinking.

3.3 *Literacy Programs*

The second in-depth evaluation focused on the effectiveness of literacy programs. Literacy services include grants with a focus on three separate areas that sometimes overlap. These areas are adult literacy, family literacy, and the Born to Read program.

3.3.1 *Family and Adult Literacy*

The Division is one of many organizations that help to promote literacy within the state of Florida. For many years, the Division's literacy program was primarily meant to support and work through the Florida Literacy Coalition, an umbrella organization designed to promote literacy across the state. The Florida Literacy Coalition consisted of school districts, community colleges, universities, workforce development centers, correctional facilities, private literacy councils, volunteers, libraries and a number of other educational, vocational, and social services.

According to the National Center for Family Literacy, family literacy programs are comprised of four primary components. These components are adult education, children's education, parent and child together (PACT) time and parent time. Each of these components have slightly different target groups and objectives. These are listed below.

- Adult Education - The primary purpose of the Adult Education component is to extend basic education skills. Adult Education aims to improve adult reasoning and problem solving skills while helping adults prepare for future employment. The curriculum also seeks to help children by helping their parents deal with personal and family problems in a constructive way.

- Children's Education - The Children's Education component is designed to help the growth and development of young children through interaction with other children and adults in a controlled environment. Children get to explore and discover their environment and interact with their peers and adults. As children develop their literacy and problem solving skills, they become more confident and gain higher self esteem.

- Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time - PACT is a program meant to provide quality time between parents and children in which children's preferences drive the activities and learning process. The end result of the PACT component is for parents and children to spend time together and provide a regularly scheduled time for parents to read to children, thus improving the likelihood that children will want to read on their own.

- ■ Parent Time - Parent Time is a time for parents to develop parenting skills and for staff to explain to parents how children grow, develop and learn. Additionally, it provides parents with numerous community resources and contacts with other parents. Further attention to family well-being is also provided.

At the advent of the LSTA program, the Division established a grant category for family literacy programs and made literacy one of the 10 program areas upon which it would focus. Thus the literacy program was tied to the Division's *Access for All* strategic plan from the plan's inception.

Evaluation of the Division's literacy program is complicated by the fact that the program did not have clearly defined objectives. This means that any evaluation of the program's effectiveness must be somewhat subjective. The intended purpose of the literacy program is to fight illiteracy, but an evaluation of the program based on literacy rates is complicated by the fact that many other factors beyond the Division's control also effect the literacy rate. Thus it would be possible for the Division to have an effective program that did not result in improved literacy rates statewide. For this reason, we have chosen to use indicators that are more program specific.

Objective 1: The number of adult and family literacy grants awarded will increase each year.

The evaluation method was to count the annual number of adult and family literacy grants.

For the first two years of the LSTA grant program, the Division awarded grants to the Family Literacy program. In the third year a separate category for Adult Literacy was created. The adult literacy program was specifically aimed at helping adults develop reading and comprehension skills and often dovetailed with the Adult Education component of the Family Literacy program. For the purposes of this evaluation, the two programs are discussed together, because many of the LSTA grants awarded in these areas trickled down to the family from the adults.

Some of the grant activities included:

- providing workshops on Family Learning;

- working to increase the education levels of adults;

- providing workshops to assist adults in increasing their employability skills;

- assisting adults with literacy skills by increasing child-initiated reading;

- helping children raise grades by providing homework help centers;

- teaching adults and children learning strategies;

- increasing parental awareness of their roles as teachers of their children, and expanding their knowledge of child development;

- expanding the interest of children in reading and reading-related activities;

- providing instructional sessions for non-English speaking parents and adults; and

- establishing and helping to develop volunteer literacy programs.

In several cases, libraries used computer-assisted instruction to build the literacy skills of adults and children through reading software packages.

To assist with the previously mentioned activities, the Division distributed information though workshops and handouts at the statewide Florida Literacy Conference and through programs at the Division's annual Library Director's Conference.

FINDING

Analysis of state grant files reveals that the number of adult and family literacy grants increased from six in year one to nine in year two and 11 in year three. **This objective has been met.**

Objective 2: The amount of dollars spent on adult and family literacy program grants will increase by 10 percent each year.

The evaluation method was to total the number of adult and family literacy grant dollars in each year and determine if the rate of increase had been met.

FINDING

Evaluation of the grant files reveals that total spending in year one was $476,940. Spending in year two fell to $420,202. However, in year three, spending for adult and family literacy grant programs increased to $691,039. Although the increase was not linear, **this objective has been met**.

Objective 3: Over one half of all public libraries will have Adult or Family literacy programs.

The evaluation method was to compare the percentage of libraries with Adult and

Family literacy programs in year one with the percentage of libraries with Adult and

Family literacy programs in year three.

Exhibit 3-1 provides a breakdown of the percentage of literacy programs offered in

libraries throughout the state.

EXHIBIT 3-1
LIBRARIES OFFERING LITERACY PROGRAMS

Program Provided	% of Libraries
Volunteer Literacy	86%
Family Literacy	52%
Computer-Assisted Instruction	48%
English Language	35%

Source: Division FAST RESPONSE Survey

The volunteer literacy programs mentioned above are volunteer-run tutoring

programs for adults. As shown above, 86 percent of libraries offer these tutoring

programs to adults. With regard to technology, 48 percent of libraries offer learning and

literacy programs with computer-assisted instruction for adults and children.

FINDING

An examination of data provided by the Florida Literacy Coalition reveals that approximately 20 percent of public libraries had Adult or Family literacy programs in year one. A Division Fast Response Survey in year three reveals that 52 percent of all responding libraries had implemented Adult of Family literacy programs by year three. **This objective has been met.**

The Division has supported literacy programs in libraries for 20 years. Originally,

the Literacy program was primarily a support arm of the Florida Literacy Coalition.

Today, the Division provides policy guidance to local libraries for grant writing and conducting effective literacy programs. Regional workshops are conducted to help local libraries plan effective literacy programs.

3.3.2 *Born to Read*

The Born to Read (BTR) program was established to share the importance of reading to infants and toddlers. BTR primarily targets at-risk, future teen parents. Libraries awarded grants in this area focused on some of the following activities:

- providing workshops for expectant mothers on the importance of reading to their children to promote language development;

- distributing "free book" coupons to new mothers;

- developing videos on prenatal health care for expectant mothers and infant care;

- producing videos on the importance of a healthy body and mind for a mother with a new baby;

- developing awareness of library programs;

- registering expectant mothers for library cards; and

- distributing library collections to hospitals and doctors' offices.

In addition to the above items, some libraries provided workshops on money management and domestic violence. Some of the mothers became aware of the program while in the hospital for delivery through the distribution of videos and literacy pamphlets.

In reviewing the annual grant files, some libraries included customer comments in the form of letters and program evaluations. Many of the customers were pleased with the programs and workshops provided by their local libraries.

According to the reviewed data, 935 BTR participants currently have library cards, including 362 who obtained them through BTR activities. Additionally, 497 children

obtained library cards through attendance at BTR activities, and 85 percent of parents indicated that they used their library card several times a month.

The Division conducted workshops to educate librarians about how to carry out a BTR program. These workshops included librarians, health care providers and community service partners. Volunteers frequently kept scrapbooks to document family impact. While the impact of the BTR program is, by design, localized, the cumulative effect should be felt across generations.

The Born to Read program was the subject of two in-depth evaluations conducted by the Family Institute at Florida State University in 1999 and 2000. Born to Read has three objectives, each of which was evaluated with a qualitative review of the previous evaluations.

Born to Read Objective 1: Enable parents to see themselves as educators for their children.

FINDING

The 1999 Born to Read Evaluation did not address this goal directly but provided evidence that parents engaged in activities that demonstrated that they did see themselves as educators to their children. These activities included reading to children, interacting with children, and selecting developmentally appropriate material. The 2000 Born to Read Evaluation presented a compelling case that this objective had been effectively met. Based on our reading of these evaluations, **this objective has been met.**

Born to Read Objective 2: Encourage and strengthen partnerships within communities between local libraries and other family service agencies.

FINDING

Both the 1999 and 2000 Born to Read assessments concluded that partnerships between local libraries and other family service agencies had been formed. The 2000 assessment also concluded that these partnerships were likely to last beyond the life of the grant period. Based on our reading of these assessments, **this objective has been met**.

Born to Read Objective 3: Promote and emphasize the role of the library and as a resource for prospective parents in a community.

FINDING

Both the 1999 and 2000 Born to Read assessments concluded that while there is insufficient evidence that library usage has increased as a result of the Born to Read program, those parents that are involved with the program are likely to visit the library, even when Born to Read activities are not scheduled. Based on our reading of these assessments, **this objective has been met**.