



## Medical Library Association Benchmarking Network Implementation Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is benchmarking?**

A: Benchmarking is a structured improvement process used to determine and implement a “better way” to do a job, a technique that provides a common measuring stick to evaluate process performance.

**Q: What is the MLA Benchmarking Network?**

A: The Network is a Website that includes definitions, bibliographies and a comprehensive instrument for medical library benchmarking. The data collection instrument was successfully beta tested in 2000-01 and the revised instrument will be available for member input in late Fall 2001.

**Q: Who can participate?**

A: MLA personal and institutional members may participate in the Benchmarking Network. The MLA Benchmarking Network survey is not designed for institutions that currently contribute to the AAHSL survey. MLA has worked closely with the AAHSL survey editor to incorporate similar questions in the Benchmarking Network, and we hope to have a connection to AAHSL data in the future. The MLA Benchmarking Network will provide data for hospital and special librarians, just as the AAHSL survey provides data for medical school libraries.

**Q: What will be the time period for data entry for the Benchmarking Network?**

A: In the first round of data collection, librarians will be able to input or revise their data in the Network beginning in late Fall 2001 and ending about three months later in Winter 2002.

**Q: Why can we only enter data during that period?**

A: It became obvious during the beta test that continuous, live, data collection would not be a viable option for providing appropriate reports and statistics. First, it would require continuous scrutiny to ensure errors were not introduced into the data. Second, we wanted the SAME data to be available to all participants, instead of varied data available at different times.

**Q: Will the data be edited or changed before it is released?**

A: The Benchmarking Editorial Team will examine data for obvious discrepancies. Team members will contact participants to attempt to clarify problems and questions so that the data is as accurate and as complete as possible.

**Q: How can I enter data?**

A: To enter the Benchmarking Network, a librarian must link from MLANET to the “Members-Only Section” of the Website. To enter this section, you must input the User Name (your MLA ID#) and Password (3 CAPITAL letters followed by 5 numbers) as identified on your MLA Membership Card. If you have any trouble in locating this number contact Beverly Bradley, Membership Coordinator, at [mlams2@mlahq.org](mailto:mlams2@mlahq.org), 312-419-9094, x 13. To collect the data necessary, the librarian may want to print out the “worksheet” that is available on the Website.

**Q: What data elements are included in the benchmarking survey instrument?**

A: The questionnaires include five areas of emphasis:

- An institutional and library profile, requesting statistical information about institutional personnel numbers, outpatient visits, number of beds, etc.;
- An administrative questionnaire, requesting information about library personnel and expenses;
- A public services questionnaire, seeking data about searching, reference and library use;
- A technical services questionnaire, gathering data relating to collection development and services; and
- A special services questionnaire requesting information about special services in your library (e.g., archives, consumer health information, fee-based services)

**Q: Why are so many diverse questions included? Why are some questions not included?**

A: The content of the survey attempts to strike a balance between those that want comparative data on very detailed questions (for services and collection issues) and those that commented that the survey was too long and arduous to complete. The Task Force anticipates that in future years, certain topics may be targeted for more in-depth questions.

**Q: After the data is collected and edited, what output or reports will we be able to get?**

A: The Benchmarking Implementation Task Force is currently working on the types of reports and data that will be available to participants and others. One critical project is the development of scenarios, with appropriate data, charts, and graphs, that librarians can use as models for getting the right data and reports for their needs.

**Q: How can I learn more?**

A: Link to [www.mlanet.org](http://www.mlanet.org) to read about the Network and to study the instrument. Each issue of the Hospital Libraries Section newsletter, *National Network*, includes updated information about the Benchmarking Network. Most importantly, connect with your benchmarking-savvy colleagues. We’ve one to get you started: Debbie Rand, Chair of Benchmarking Network Implementation Task Force, [Rand@lij.edu](mailto:Rand@lij.edu). Also, you will want to check with your Chapter or visit MLANET to determine your BCE – Benchmarking Chapter Educator. This is your regional expert on the MLA Benchmarking Network.