ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ARCHIVES ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Government archives play a significant role in facilitating access and guaranteeing the preservation of records. In addition, public recordkeeping supports administrative functions and also plays a role in the protection of rights of citizens. This project casts a different look at the importance of government archives to their communities. In this era of budget cuts and downsizing, public-supported archives can demonstrate their social value as a public good beyond the traditional role of facilitating access and preservation. This project describes an economic impact survey that attempted to measure the ways in which government archives contribute to the local economy.

Archival Metrics and User Evaluation for Government Archives Project

The NHPRC funded Archival Metrics and User Evaluation for Government Archives project seeks to promote the culture of assessment for government repositories by creating standardized survey tools and other performance measures. At the project kickoff meeting in May 2009, some of the repository partners expressed interest in conducting an economic impact survey, as part of a larger project. (http://www.archivalmetrics.org/)

Economic Impact Survey

- Date: August 3rd - September 6th, 2009
- 43 government repositories (state, county, and municipal) offered the survey to researchers who visited their facilities.
- 1966 responses were gathered in total.

* The survey was anonymous.

FINDINGS

1 Participating Repositories

- Georgia Archives
- Tennessee State Library and Archives
- North Carolina State Archives
- West Virginia Archives and History Library
- Hawaii State Archives
- Library of Virginia
- etc

Among 43 participating repositories, state archives dominated the number of participants and the survey returned.

The mean number of responses was: 52 for state archives, 11 for county, and 28 for municipal.

2 Economic Impact on Local Communities

Economic impact is generally measured by examining cultural tourism. This survey was timed to capture local visitors as well as cultural tourism. This is important since most visitors to government archives are local.

- On average visitors travelled 214 miles to visit the archives.
- Archives were the primary destination of most respondents; 69% stated that they planned their trip specifically to visit the archives.
- Almost all respondents spent money in the local communities in connection with their archives visit. (Figure 2. Total Expenditures)

- 41% of the visitors from a distance and 20% of those living in the area plan to visit other sites in conjunction with their archives visit.
- 38% of visitors from outside the area and 19% of the local visitors shop or use local services in conjunction with their archives visit.
- 69% of those from outside the area and 33% of those from the area eat in nearby restaurants.

Figure 1. Purpose for visiting the Archives

(N=1765)

Genealogy & Family History (1151, 65%)
Work-related Research
Academic Research
Teaching & Curriculum Development
Personal Interest
Other

Figure 2. Total Expenditures (N=1702)

$1-99 $100-499 $500-999 $1000-1499 $1500-more

200 400 600 800 1000 1200

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