Public Libraries Survey Data Element #653 - Website Visits FAQs

**Definition:** Visits represent the annual number of sessions initiated by all users from inside or outside the library to the library website. The library website consists of all webpages under the library’s domain. A website “visit” or “session” occurs when a user connects to the library’s website for any length of time or purpose, regardless of the number of pages or elements viewed. Usage of library social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) should not be reported here.

**Why should we collect website visits?** Traditional output measures such as visits, circulation, and program attendance are increasingly inadequate to capture the wide variety of ways that people use the library. A growing number of people use library services via library websites without ever setting foot in the building, and a subset of those who visit the building use the library website during their visit. If we don’t track website visits, then the story we can tell about library usage is at best incomplete.

**What if my library doesn’t have a website?** You should only report this data element if your library has its own website. If your “website” is your Facebook page, then do not report. If your library’s web presence is a page on your city or county website, then do not report (for now, at least).

**How do libraries collect this data element?** If a library is not already tracking website visits, one option for collecting this information is Google Analytics (GA), a free web analytics tool that tracks and reports website visits. After signing up for GA, respondents will need to establish an account for their library’s website. Then, they can view the “Audience” report, which presents four data elements in the “Overview” section: Sessions, Users, Pageview, and Pages / Session. “Sessions” contains the data that should be reported. Respondents can filter the data by year by clicking on the date range in the top right corner of the “Overview” section and using the pop-up calendars to select their date range.

To implement GA, respondents need to have editing access to their library’s website. If they do not have direct access, they can go through an intermediary such as an IT department. If their library’s website is managed by an external agency such as the town or county government, this provides an opportunity for them to build relationships with these agencies while gaining access to data that will enable them to better serve their users.

There are alternatives to GA for tracking website analytics such as Crazy Egg, however, these typically require a paid subscription.

**Additional articles regarding Google Analytics with some popular website platforms:**
- Use Analytics with Blogger: https://support.google.com/blogger/answer/7039627?hl=en
- How to Install Google Analytics in Wordpress for Beginners: https://www.wpbeginner.com/beginners-guide/how-to-install-google-analytics-in-wordpress/
- Weebly: Getting Started with Google Analytics: https://www.weebly.com/blog/getting-started-with-google-analytics/

**Questions?** Contact SDSL Data Coordinator: mailto:shawn.behrends@state.sd.us / 605.773.3131, opt. 6.