

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (NIMH)
COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES EVALUATION
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

SUMMARY REPORT

FINAL

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (NIMH) COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES EVALUATION FEASIBILITY STUDY SUMMARY REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report summarizes the methods and findings of a feasibility study conducted by Aspen Systems Corporation (Aspen) for the Office of Science Policy, Planning, and Communications (OSPPC), an entity supported by the Office of the Director, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).¹ The scope of the study covered activities conducted primarily within the Public Information and Communications Branch (PICB) of the OSPPC.

The OSPPC, overall, is responsible for creating and implementing the Institute's communications efforts, such as media relations and information dissemination, to the general public and to the research and scientific community. Its mission is to disseminate and communicate information aimed at improving the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses and brain disorders. The goals of the OSPPC are accomplished through information dissemination activities that primarily include responding to public inquiries (telephone, e-mail, fax, mail); working with the press, advocacy groups and other partners; preparing and distributing publications; and developing and managing the NIMH Website. The PICB, specifically, is comprised of the Science Writing and Press Team, Information Dissemination and Inquiries Team, and the Electronic Communications Team.

The information dissemination activities carried out primarily by the PICB within the OSPPC are currently tracked and monitored through a range of data collection efforts. In addition, the OSPPC collects periodic evaluation data to monitor user satisfaction and to guide improvements to the communications services it provides. To ensure that information dissemination activities are efficient, productive, and responsive, the OSPPC needs a comprehensive overview of the status, nature, and extent of current data collection activities. In addition, the OSPPC recognized the need to identify current and future evaluation goals, to develop a coordinated communications data-monitoring program to support activities associated with these goals, and to play a large role in health communications decision-making for the Institute.

Specifically, Aspen has conducted this feasibility study to provide the following:

- A description of current data collection/evaluation activities within the PICB.
- Identification of gaps between current data collection activities and perceived evaluation needs.
- A framework for data collection and management, which includes a plan for a communications data-monitoring program to address the evaluation needs of the PICB.

¹ This study was supported through an Evaluation Express Award, funds made available through the Office of Evaluation, National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The feasibility study was designed to address three key research questions:

- What data collection and evaluation activities are currently being implemented to ensure that resources are properly and effectively used?
- What are the immediate and long-range communications services evaluation priorities?
- How can current data collection and evaluation activities be modified and/or enhanced to meet immediate and long-range evaluation priorities?

The focus of this study is on the three key areas within the purview of the PICB: the Information Center, the NIMH Website, and the Real Men Real Depression (RMRD) campaign. Evaluators from Aspen's Health Programs Research Division conducted the feasibility study for NIMH. Although the study was initially funded and launched in August 2003, NIMH was undergoing significant reorganization, and hence, activities related to this project experienced intermittent delays. The study resumed in early July 2005 after reorganization was completed.² This report includes five additional sections:

- Section 2 presents the methodology for conducting the feasibility study.
- Section 3 describes the results of the study.
- Section 4 provides a framework for a systematic and integrated data collection and management plan.
- Section 5 discusses a detailed set of recommendations to implement this systematic data-monitoring program.
- Section 6 presents a brief summary and conclusions statement.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two phases, as described in this section.

2.1 Phase I. Overview of Current Data Collection Activities and Identification of Evaluation Priorities

Phase I was the exploratory phase in which two methods were used to gather information on the status, nature, and extent of current data collection activities, including data management and reporting, conducted within the PICB: document review and key informant interviews.

Document review. An important part of understanding the overall communications services of the OSPPC was to review both internal and external documentation that pertain to collection and use of data. The PICB staff, with the assistance of staff within the Science Policy and Evaluation Branch, identified documents related to its communications activities and provided them to Aspen staff. One set of documents was retrieved in early 2004, while another set was identified and retrieved during the key informant interviews conducted from August through September 2005. In reviewing these documents, the objective(s), methods (if available), and significant

² The Science Policy & Evaluation Branch (NIMH) provided valuable assistance during this stage of the project.

results were examined. A complete list of all 28 documents reviewed by Aspen staff for this feasibility study can be found in **Appendix A**.

Key informant interviews. Interviews conducted with key staff were intended to clarify evaluation priorities in relation to the overall goals and constraints of the PICB, as well as to identify gaps between current status and perceived evaluation needs. The discussions addressed the following issues:

- Mission, goals, and communications priorities.
- Current PICB communications activities and data collection efforts.
- Identification of gaps in current activities and addressing evaluation priorities.
- Future direction for evaluation of PICB communications activities.

Aspen staff conducted a total of seven key informant interviews with eight participants.³ Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and were conducted during business hours during the period of August 10 through September 1, 2005. These in-depth information-gathering interviews were conducted primarily in-person, although one interview was conducted over the telephone. As approved by NIMH, two versions of the protocol were developed (see **Appendix B**). The protocol that facilitated interviews with NIMH staff (Version A) differed only slightly from the one used with contractors (Version B).

Table 1: Key Informant Interview Participants

PARTICIPANT	POSITION TITLE, AFFILIATION	VERSION OF PROTOCOL
Della Hann	Director of the OSPPC, NIMH; Acting Branch of the Public Information and Communications Branch (PICB), OSPPC/NIMH	A
Daisy Whittemore	Former Acting Team Leader of the Information Dissemination and Inquiries Team, PICB/OSPPC/NIMH	A
James Petersen	Acting Team Leader of the Electronic Communications Team, PICB/OSPPC/NIMH	A
Jennifer Loukissas	Press Staff in the Information Dissemination and Inquiries Team, PICB/OSPPC/NIMH	A
Janell Richardson	Lead Public Affairs Specialist in the Information Dissemination and Inquiries Team, PICB/OSPPC/NIMH; Project Officer for Circle Solutions, Inc.	A
Kate Egan	Acting Team Leader of the Science Writing and Press Team, PICB/OSPPC/NIMH	A
Jac Cramer	Project Director, Circle Solutions, Inc. (Contractor)	B
Kelly Kenneally	Deputy Project Director, Circle Solutions, Inc. (Contractor)	B

The sample of participants consisted of six selected staff members from PICB and two from Circle Solutions, Inc. (Circle).⁴ These individuals were identified as critical players in the communications activities conducted by and for the OSPPC. **Table 1** provides an overview of

³ One interview involved two participants.

⁴ Aspen received suggestions from NIMH on the selection of participants.

the participants, their affiliation as it relates to OSPPC, and the version of the protocol used to facilitate the interview.

2.2 Phase II. Synthesis of Findings/Development of Framework

Phase II involved synthesizing the results found during the activities of Phase I – document review and key informant interviews. Results consist of details regarding current data collection/evaluation activities and an identification of gaps between current activities and perceived evaluation needs. These results are then examined to develop a framework for a systematic communications data-monitoring program for current and future PICB communications activities. Based on the framework, recommendations are provided for implementation, along with next steps for NIMH as a whole in relation to its communications services and evaluation goals.

3. RESULTS

This section summarizes the results of each activity conducted during Phase I of the feasibility study.

3.1 Document Review

Aspen collected and reviewed reports or documents that addressed the various communications activities conducted by and for the PICB. Many of the documents retrieved from NIMH and reviewed by Aspen staff focused on activities pertaining to the RMRD campaign and to NIMH Website use.⁵ The reviewed documents primarily addressed the following four activity areas:

- Telephone and e-mail inquiries⁶
- Publications distribution
- NIMH Web analysis findings
- RMRD campaign achievements

Results from the document review are summarized below by communications activity area. Evaluative statements are provided in italics where applicable.

Telephone and e-mail inquiries. Circle has been responding to telephone calls and e-mail inquiries that relate primarily to NIMH and the RMRD campaign.⁷ Previous data collections conducted via telephone or e-mail by other organizations have now been consolidated in Circle's Information Center.⁸ The monthly reports available for Aspen staff document activities conducted between April and June 2005.

⁵ A limitation of this study is that interpretation of findings is restricted to the set of documents provided to Aspen by NIMH staff.

⁶ These activities are a component of the NIMH Information Center.

⁷ Circle maintains two separate toll-free telephone lines for general information and for the RMRD campaign.

⁸ The U.S. Census Bureau previously managed three NIMH toll-free telephone lines for receiving NIMH public inquiries.

These reports highlight specific key communications activities performed by the Information Center at Circle. These reports are extensively detailed with statistics and progress on responses to public inquiries received by Circle. Statistics include reason for inquiry, mode of inquiry, title of publications requested via Website, and the inventory of publications. The majority of telephone calls (over 90 percent) were conducted in English, and the remaining calls were done in Spanish.⁹ Based on May and June 2005 data, only a small percentage of these calls (less than 3 percent) focused on RMRD.¹⁰

Matthews Media Group, Inc. (MMG) also collected data on telephone inquiries for the RMRD campaign between April 2003 and January 2004. In addition to the total number of calls received during these months, reports also include the following categories that may assist NIMH in improving data collection via the telephone by integrating with Circle's data collection activities:

- Type of caller (e.g., self, family, friend, client, other, repeated caller).
- Reason for call (e.g., request for information packet, media call, campaign call, mental health referral, crisis call, request for Web assistance).
- Source of call (e.g., Internet, journal article, magazine, newspaper, radio, television, other).

Based on these reports by Circle and MMG, the top two methods of inquiry are, by far, telephone and Internet. According to statistics sheets produced by Circle, almost one-third of calls are requests for information packets¹¹, and almost half of the callers are considered "self." Over 20 percent of inquirers make the call as a result of finding the telephone number(s) on the Internet. This level of information may be useful in creating FAQs on the NIMH Website. Telephone calls can then be charted, and the impact can be examined. For instance, it may be valuable to observe the effect of Web use over time as a result of having the most commonly requested information more readily available.

Monthly reports from Circle (April through June 2005) indicate the majority of inquirers (approximately two-fifths) communicate with the Information Center via the Web. These findings can be useful in fine-tuning the data collection efforts by further understanding the value of each communications channel (e.g., Website, telephone, e-mail). The reports also state that inquirers classify themselves as "Other" or "Unknown" – these general categories make it very difficult for the NIMH to understand its audience and target its products and services.

Publications distribution. Circle maintains several lists of all RMRD publications available during the period of April 2003 through February 2005 and April through June 2005. This compilation of inventory includes the number of copies in stock and number of copies sent to the different types of groups or audiences (individual, conference, partner). One significant finding from this analysis is that the majority of publications are sent to individuals who request them,

⁹ Based on the monthly reports by Circle (April through June 2005), the samples of telephone calls for each month are 1,946 (April 2005), 1,973 (May 2005), and 1,761 (June 2005).

¹⁰ The monthly report by Circle for April 2005 did not include data on telephone inquiries regarding RMRD.

¹¹ It is worth noting that the telephone has been the OSPPC's standard method of disseminating information.

followed by bulk orders of three copies or more (presumably to organizations). Based on Circle's monthly reports (April through June 2005), the most popular publications ordered via the Web are "Bipolar Disorder" (Pub ID NIH 04-3679) (approximately 5 percent) and "A Story of Bipolar Disorder" (Pub ID NIH 03-5085) (approximately 4 percent). Over the course of three months (April through June 2005), there was a 40 percent decline in publications requested via the Web.¹² Based on statistics sheets produced by Circle, other popular publications include "Men and Depression" (Pub ID NIH 03-4972) and the tri-fold publication "Real Men. Real Depression. It Takes Courage to Ask for Help" (Pub ID NIH 03-5300). However, according to the monthly Publications Inventory Report maintained by the Information Center, none of the most requested publications were immediately available in stock.¹³

Having information on the most frequently requested publications may also impact what information is being presented on the Website, or what information is disseminated through the various media (e.g., exhibits, press releases). Ultimately, this can improve the inventory of publications. Software used by other federal agencies has been useful in creating and updating FAQs that automatically reorder publications based upon popularity.¹⁴

NIMH Web analysis findings. Data collected by E3 include Website hits as a function of time spent (in minutes), day of the week, and hour of the day from July 2003 through September 2003. The findings show that the most viewed sites are the "Signs and Symptoms" and "Depression in Men" pages.¹⁵ Also, downloads of printable materials outnumber the use of audio and video files.

NIMH continues to receive monthly reports from WebTrends that display specific Web activity on the NIMH Website. Aspen staff reviewed the July 2005 monthly report, which includes information such as total number of hits by hour of the day and day of the week, most downloaded files, top organizations by visit, top countries by visit, and duration of visit.¹⁶

As discovered during the key informant interview process (see Section 3.2 below), the data from the WebTrends reports have not been used thus far for any important decision-making. Perhaps the most useful finding from these reports is the list of most downloaded files. Knowing which publication(s) is most popular can assist NIMH staff in ordering the appropriate publications to have on hand for distribution, for strategic advertising in various media channels or communications outlets, or for making them more prominent on the Website.

In addition, NIMH has also contracted with ForeSee Results to develop and administer the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). ACSI is designed to pop up on the computer

¹² This statistic is based on the monthly reports provided by Circle. Aspen has in possession detailed reports from April through June 2005.

¹³ Finding based on monthly Publications Inventory Reports from April through June 2005.

¹⁴ NIMH may want to examine the feasibility of this software for its own data collection efforts.

¹⁵ Since MMG only handled RMRD inquiries, it is not surprising that the most viewed sites described by MMG are the RMRD Web pages.

¹⁶ Government regulations on the collection of "cookies" limit access to personal information on Web users.

screen at some point in a user's visiting time. This survey ultimately measures customer satisfaction of the NIMH Website.¹⁷

Real Men Real Depression campaign achievements. NIMH receives monthly Campaign Achievements reports produced by Equals Three Communications, Inc. (E3), which highlight many or all successes of the campaign media channels. In the December 2004 and June 2005 reports, the overall accomplishments of the media, public service announcements, advocacy/partner organizations, advertisements, and other forms of channel are described. These reports also briefly describe the public's response to the campaign's educational materials, along with a count of the Website hits, telephone calls, e-mail inquiries, and publication requests and/or download.

One limitation of these reports is the lack of graphical illustrations depicting patterns or trends across time or across activity. However, the most useful information that can be extracted from these reports is the level of efforts of individual advocacy or partner organizations that are conducting their own RMRD campaign. Because these organizations may not necessarily have common base measures and/or are conducting different activities, it is difficult to conduct a cross-site evaluation of the Campaign in these various locations. It can be suggested to these partner organizations that a common measure be adopted for the purpose of a valid and reliable cross-site evaluation.

Summary of Key Findings. The collection of relevant documents was a useful exercise in that it prompted NIMH staff to consider the pieces of information (i.e., statements of work, reports, and statistics sheets) that may be of value for the external review conducted through this feasibility study. The method of producing documents for the study, however, reflected the lack of a systematic approach within the Office to coordinating and managing activities of this nature, and resulted in both an imbalance of reports provided to Aspen for review, as well as the likely omission of some key documentation.¹⁸ As **Appendix A** illustrates, most of the documents reviewed (64 percent) pertained to activities and achievements of the RMRD campaign, resulting in a slant in perspective of the data collection activities conducted by and for the PICB.

Furthermore, the existence of some of these documents was not necessarily known across all key informants interviewed, as discussed in Section 3.2 below. For those aware of the documents, they state the ineffectiveness of the data or findings in relation to its impact on decision-making. Of the information already received by the PICB, the most potentially useful data are:

- Number of telephone calls and e-mails:
 - *These counts will help NIMH understand the appropriate staffing required in assisting these inquiries.*
- Reason for calls and e-mails:
 - *If the reason is a publication request, the following information is most useful: 1) Number of publication requests; 2) Number of publications sent; 3) Type of publications requested and sent; and 4) Title of publications requested and sent.*
- Type of caller or e-mail inquirer:

¹⁷ Data collection of the ACSI Survey has recently begun and therefore regular reports have not been generated.

¹⁸ This was confirmed in the preliminary review of a draft version of this report by OSPPC staff.

- *NIMH can use this information to better define their target audiences and ensure that the appropriate materials or content are available to them.*
- Source of call or e-mail:
 - *This information will allow NIMH to identify gaps in their marketing approach. For instance, according to RMRD campaign statistics produced by MMG, over one-fifth of individuals obtain the Circle Information Center's telephone numbers from the NIMH Website, 17.8 percent get the information from television shows (e.g., C-SPAN and ABC World News Tonight), and 13.6 percent get it from various newspapers (e.g., Chicago Tribune). Only a small percentage of callers get the information from journals (5.6 percent) and magazines (8.7 percent, N=819).*
- Most downloaded files from the NIMH Website:
 - *This information can give NIMH staff a sense of which topics are most popular, and use that information to promote across all communications sources, such as the media, press release, and Website.*

The following research questions, potentially useful for significant decision-making, are not addressed through current data collection activities:

- Are the publications requested, sent, and downloaded useful? Are the users satisfied in the information available to them in these publications? Are users searching for topics that are not currently available through NIMH?
 - *To answer these questions, a follow-up user satisfaction tool could be distributed to participants and users. Circle has developed several surveys for evaluating user satisfaction via e-mail, mail, telephone, and the Internet. Obtaining this information is the first step in assessing the impact of publications on behavioral change, at least in the short-term context. Depending on the questions on these surveys, the benefits and barriers may be determined for print versus electronic publications, user preference for each method, and other relevant factors. The user satisfaction surveys would also help NIMH know which method results in higher satisfaction scores.*
- What impact does the RMRD campaign have at the various locations throughout the country conducted by advocacy or partner organizations?
 - *To validly answer this question, the campaigns at each location could have a common tool to measure outcomes for a cross-site evaluation, which can assess the impact of the campaign.*

Nonetheless, these documents were useful to Aspen in helping to delineate the roles of staff (including contract staff), the nature of data collection activities, and the current format for reporting on accomplishments, such as number and type of inquirers reached, and number and type of publications sent.

An abundance of information is being collected for and by the PICB. Much of the data are presented either as monthly reports or single statistics sheets, such as text, graphs, and tables.¹⁹ One major gap in data management is the lack of a systematic collection and review process once the data arrive to NIMH. Results, as currently presented, often require additional

¹⁹ This conclusion is based on the 28 documents available for review by Aspen staff. See **Appendix A** for the complete list.

interpretation to understand the relationship, for example, between media and outreach events and Website activity.

A useful tool for the data collection and management process may be an easy-to-read brief summary report, which may include illustrations, that contains only the information that is perceived as useful for significant decision-making.

Other suggestions regarding possible reports include:

- *Develop a timeline that tracks media and local outreach events, which are currently tracked by E3, and overlay timeline with WebTrends results (e.g., pages visited, number of Web hits).*
- *Map the activities to evaluate geographic coverage for RMRD campaign events.*
- *Present media hits by activity within the RMRD campaign achievement reports as well as the overall total.*
- *Compile a list of topics most frequently covered in press clips or press releases.*

Additional recommendations related to these observations and tools are presented in Sections 4 and 5.

3.2 Key Informant Interviews

The findings presented in this section represent a synthesis of results from the seven key informant interviews.²⁰ Illustrative comments from participants are provided in quotations.

The results are summarized by interview question within three thematic areas:

- OSPPC Mission, Goals, and Communications Priorities.
- Current PICB Communications Activities and Data Collection Efforts.
- Identification of Gaps in Current Activities and Addressing Evaluation Priorities.

OSPPC Mission, Goals, and Communications Priorities. The mission, goals and communications priorities of the OSPPC were addressed by two discussion questions:

1. What do you think are the OSPPC communications priorities?

The majority of the participants indicated that the priority of the OSPPC in communications is disseminating information. Three participants stated that information should be disseminated to the general public, and three participants also said information should be spread to the research and scientific community.

Other participants had the following comments:

- The OSPPC should “reduce stigma of mental disorders... that these brain disorders are treatable, preventable, and diagnosable.”

²⁰ All key informant interviews are confidential. Results are synthesized and reported in the aggregate.

- Priorities are not being set.
- The OSPPC staff should be “more proactive... in making the necessary changes.”

2. What are the research questions you hope to address with this communications needs assessment/evaluation?

Participants had many wide-ranging research questions for this feasibility study:

- What does the general public want to know from NIMH?
- What does the research community want to know from NIMH?
- What publication topics are in greatest or in least demand?
- Are there publication topics that are in demand that are not available by NIMH?
- Can each communication mechanism (e.g., Website, publications, exhibits, press releases) be assessed to determine if the target audience is being reached?²¹
- Can a systematic data collection and management program be developed that will centralize all information and be used for the NIMH decision-making process?

*Current PICB Communications Activities and Data Collection Efforts*²². Two questions generated discussion of current PICB communications activities:

1. What data do you currently collect? Is there a database system in place? Who collects the data? In what method or format are the data being collected?

While two of the participants were uncertain or unaware of specific current PICB communications activities, others provided some information about such efforts. The following is a description of the data collection activities currently conducted for and by the PICB. The findings are organized by the agency responsible for the data collection.²³

Collected by Circle Solutions, Inc.²⁴

- Telephone calls and e-mail inquiries on the RMRD campaign (e.g., type of inquirer, materials requested, repeated inquiry).
- Mail and fax inquiries from the general public for the NIMH Outreach Partnership Program and for conference support activities.

²¹ As mentioned in the RMRD Campaign Evaluation Report (April 2003 – September 2004) prepared by E3, the successful evaluation of this campaign is limited due to uncertainty as to whether target audiences are being reached. This level of uncertainty is also apparent for other communications activities.

²² Responses to questions in this section of the interview may overlap with findings from the document review (see Section 3.1). The level of overlaps may indicate the degree of knowledge of deliverables across key staff and what products are actually available to them.

²³ These findings are produced by the respective organization or agency into reports or statistics sheets and submitted to NIMH.

²⁴ Circle Solutions staff categorize the data by topic areas (such as RMRD campaign, Outreach Partnership Programs, etc.). All data are then entered into a software program developed in-house and reported to NIMH on a monthly, quarterly, and ad-hoc basis.

- Inventory of publications (e.g., what types of publications get mailed out and to whom, which topics are in greatest or least demand).
- Information collected from exhibits (e.g., group, type of publications requested).

Collected by ForeSee Results

- American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) measures customer satisfaction of the NIMH Website (this data collection activity has recently begun therefore regular reports have not been generated).

Collected by WebTrends

- Log files of Web activity by users (e.g., which page is visited the most, length of time spent on each page).

Collected by Equals Three Communications, Inc.

- Omnibus Survey gauges public awareness of depression and how it is covered in the media.

Collected by NIMH

- Focus groups conducted with men and practitioners on the RMRD campaign to assess the effectiveness of the message(s).
- Press calls in response to a particular topic.
- Internal user groups will provide feedback of the NIMH Website (this process has not begun).

2. How have the data been used? Have they been useful/valuable?

The general consensus among participants is that the data being collected have not been used properly. According to one participant, the data “are not being packaged in a useful way.” Another stated that the data “only feeds curiosity but do not help in decision making.” However, some of the data have been used to gain a better understanding of consumers and their needs, to order publications, and to see the progress of the RMRD campaign.

Identification of Gaps in Current Activities and Addressing Evaluation Priorities. There were three discussion questions related to perceived gaps in current activities as they pertain to evaluation:

1. What specific outcomes, if any, can be assessed from the data collected?

Because the data currently being collected have not been of great use to NIMH, it is very difficult to assess significant outcomes from the data. As one participant said, NIMH has not been able to “convert the information in a way useful for decision making purposes.”

However, the OSPPC has been able to use these data to understand the basic nature of inquiries. Some of the assessable outcomes include:

- Characteristics of inquirer.
- Number of publications requested and distributed.
- Number of exhibits held.
- Type of media that broadcast news on depression (e.g., television, radio).
- Website activities (e.g., number of hits, downloads, search terms²⁵).
- Number of press releases on depression.

2. What challenges/barriers are faced when conducting communications activities by or for the PICB?

Several participants indicated that staffing – more specifically, staffing shortage – is a major barrier to conducting the PICB communications activities. Two additional commonly cited challenges faced when conducting these activities include: 1) little or no integration between branches within NIMH and between teams under each branch, and 2) little or no discussion on data collection at regular NIMH meetings. Other barriers include:

- Budget limitations.
- Lack of a user-friendly database accessible by all parties.²⁶
- Government regulations on the collection of “cookies” limits access to personal information on Web users.
- Inability to evaluate data on its true effectiveness, such as the impact of communication mechanisms (e.g., Website, publications) on target audience.
- Community partnerships doing their own evaluation of the RMRD campaign have few common measures, which makes a cross-site evaluation very difficult to conduct.
- Request for information or findings that do not easily correspond to data currently being collected (e.g., data requested for a congressional testimonial may not have been collected in the same way that the PICB was looking for).
- Time needed to stabilize after mass reorganization.

3. What future direction would you advise for the PICB’s communications activities?

Among the participants, the general consensus on future direction of the PICB in relation to communications activities is to ultimately be more proactive. The following is a list of participants’ suggestions for the PICB to better improve data collection and management, organized by immediate and long-term priorities for the future.

²⁵ Aspen conducted an analysis of 2002-2003 search terms on the NIMH Website that could be replicated and may be useful for the future.

²⁶ Feedback on the draft of this report provided information that Circle has developed a number of interactive Web-based interfaces accessible to NIMH staff regarding the Outreach Partnership Program, conference support, publication distribution and inventory, and RMRD advocacy activities. Aspen was not made aware of this during its primary data collection phase including key informant interviews and document review.

Immediate priorities:

- Re-format the presentation of the data to be easily readable and understandable.
- Assess the effectiveness of the Website and publications.
- Gather data and information more strategically by collecting only what is needed so that staff can “make decisions based upon reporting needs and organizational needs.”
- Centralize the data collection mechanism so that people within the PICB and the overall OSPPC can access them without difficulty.

Long-term priorities:

- Establish a closer working relationship with the NIMH Director so that he is aware of what each team and branch is doing.
- Improve visibility at the NIH level by promoting or advertising, possibly through a campaign designed to promote the activities of the OSPPC.
- Conduct more meetings or increase interaction between the teams within the PICB so that everyone is aware of each other’s responsibilities and projects.

Summary of Key Findings. The key informant interviews proved to be useful on several levels. First, they provided NIMH staff with the opportunity to learn more about the communications services evaluation feasibility study, and then to express their views on issues pertaining to improving data collection and reporting. The interviews also provide recommendations for improving the evaluation of communications activities. Even the feedback of those participants who were originally unaware of the project was helpful and constructive.

In addition, the interviews illustrate that there is agreement among key staff as to the mission of the OSPPC – to disseminate information to its primary audiences: the general public and the research and scientific community. Evaluation activities conducted in 2002-2003, including the NIMH Website survey, provided evidence on the topics of most interest to users and led to the successful redesign of the NIMH Website. At present, participants agreed that the focus for future and ongoing data collection activities should include the systematic and comprehensive identification of communication priorities so that realistic evaluation goals can be set.

The discussion of the PICB communications priorities included the generation of key research questions in need of assessment. Often, these research questions serve as the basis for the development of an evaluation plan. These questions, such as “*What does the public want to know from NIMH?*” vs. “*What does the research and scientific community want to know from NIMH?*” may require staff to examine findings across data collection sources as well as to attend to the external factors that may influence audience needs and desires for type of information sought as well as mode of communication preferred. Questions that pertain to determining if target audiences are being reached through each communications channel are frequently more difficult to ascertain.

Other findings from the key informant interviews are discussed in Section 3.3 (Summary of Findings on Current Data Collection Activities) and Section 3.4 (Summary of Findings on Evaluation Gaps) below.

3.3 Summary of Findings on Current Data Collection Activities

The results of the document review and key informant interviews summarized in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 provide an overview of the communications activities and the data associated with each. This section summarizes these findings through the presentation of a preliminary alignment of data collection source and key research question.

Table 2 presents a matrix that illustrates sources for evaluation data, by linking sample research questions to communications channel. This matrix includes many of the research questions known to be of interest to the OSPPC. Utilizing a matrix approach to presenting the information allows one to address questions such as:

- What are the core questions of interest across all data sources?
- How can we provide a method to identify which of the multiple data channels best address the research question of interest?
- Are there gaps in data collection?
- Is there redundancy in data collection?
- What does each data collection method uniquely contribute?
- Where would one find answers to questions posed by the media or by Congress?
- Are these data collected passively (e.g., through e-mails) or more actively (e.g., through satisfaction surveys)?

The research questions provided in **Table 2** below are those that can be easily answered using available data. As shown in the table, more than one research question can be addressed within communication channel, and the same research question can be addressed across more than one communication channel. The data currently available within the OSPPC provides numerous indicators of the breadth and depth of reach of the communications activities. Indicators of reach, or counts of people potentially reached, is the first steppingstone to addressing the possible impact of the information services on people's lives.

Questions pertaining to the effect of the information, such as what users do or intend to do with the knowledge gained, would constitute an impact analysis. Questions on a survey may address behavioral intentions regarding the information, but actual links to behavior are harder to ascertain. Questions regarding the use or perception of the information conveyed through a particular communication service requires different modes of data collection, such as a follow-up survey, in-depth interviews, or focus groups. These efforts are particularly worthwhile in the early stages of campaign development or in pre-testing new publication formats. The current feasibility and cost of undertaking a data collection of this type is beyond the scope of this report.

Table 2. Sources for Evaluation Data by Research Question and Communications Channel

RESEARCH QUESTION ²⁷	COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL					
	TELEPHONE ^{28,29}	E-MAIL ²⁹	WEBSITE		MEDIA ³⁰	EXHIBITS
			WEBTRENDS REPORTS	SATISFACTION SURVEYS		
What are the characteristics of users?	✓ 31	✓ 31		✓ 32		✓ 31
What is the volume of use (usage pattern)?	✓ 31	✓ 31	✓ 33	✓ 32	✓ 34	✓ 31
What information are users seeking?	✓ 31	✓ 31	✓ 33	✓ 32		✓ 31
Are users satisfied with the information found?				✓ 32		
Are users satisfied with the method by which the information was found?				✓ 32		
Are publications requested and sent?	✓ 31	✓ 31		✓ 32		✓ 31
How frequently do users utilize or access NIMH	✓ 31	✓ 31	✓ 33	✓ 32		✓ 31

²⁷ Sources for research questions include the set of ACSI Custom Questions and the coding scheme for the analysis of public inquiries (telephone, e-mail) conducted for NIMH by Aspen.

²⁸ Pertaining to either the general information hotline or the RMRD campaign hotline.

²⁹ Through these communications channels, research questions are generated from the Aspen RMRD Information Services Analysis/Coding Form.

³⁰ Based on RMRD campaign achievements reports produced by MMG, there is currently no method to analyze the impact of the media on the audience, or to gather more specific information on the audience.

³¹ Information is collected by Circle Solutions, Inc. Data are packaged into monthly reports and statistics sheets.

³² Information is collected by ForeSee Results, Inc. This data collection is still in its early stages.

³³ Information is collected by WebTrends, Inc. Data are presented monthly.

³⁴ Information is collected by Equals Three Communications, Inc. (based on the available documents, particularly the RMRD Campaign Achievements Reports for December 2004 and June 2005. The reports include information on detailed monitoring for RMRD efforts and other select media activities.

services?						
What topics are most frequently asked about or accessed?	✓ 31	✓ 31	✓ 33	✓ 32		✓ 31

3.4 Summary of Findings on Evaluation Gaps

The purpose for conducting an evaluation is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of programs, products, and activities to improve their effectiveness. Findings of this study show that although the PICB is putting considerable effort into collecting information and data that could be used to evaluate their activities, the efforts are lacking in cohesion, uniformity and purpose. The current condition is due in part to the relative novelty of some of the data in the field of communications (e.g., the voluminous WebTrends reports), to the lack of stability within the organization as it has undergone change, and to the lack of a framework to guide the evaluation efforts. As stated previously, the feasibility study is a critical step toward building a solution by identifying key data collection, management, and reporting issues that constitute a meaningful evaluation approach.

The results of the document review and key informant interviews indicate that communications activities (and their associated data collections – see **Table 2**) have not been strategically linked to overall OSPPC priorities, goals and objectives (these may be in the process of being defined due to recent reorganization). However, current and former staff members of the OSPPC as well as those of the former NIMH Office of Communications have shown a commitment to the development of an approach that coordinates data collection efforts toward addressing common research questions. In particular, the NIMH Website survey conducted in 2002 and analyzed in 2002-2003 provided valuable feedback on user type, type of information sought, satisfaction with information, and usage patterns that influenced the redesign of the Website and also provided useful direction for future evaluation activities. (**Appendix C** provides a summary of NIMH evaluation activities conducted with the assistance of Aspen, as requested by the OSPPC in July 2005. Additional information about these activities is available upon request).

Regarding gaps in current activities in relation to evaluation goals, the results of Phase I suggest that the major gaps do not necessarily lie in the availability of data but in the lack of coordination in management and use of these data. This study found, for example, that some of the interview participants were unaware of the range and/or purpose of the various data collection activities currently being implemented. Furthermore, when the list of reviewed documents is cross-referenced with the information learned from the key informants regarding data collection efforts, it is clear that NIMH has at its disposal much of the data needed to help guide its decisions regarding its communication activities. Current staff members, many of them new to their positions within the PICB, are aware of these limitations, and appear ready to develop more effective policies and procedures to address evaluation needs.

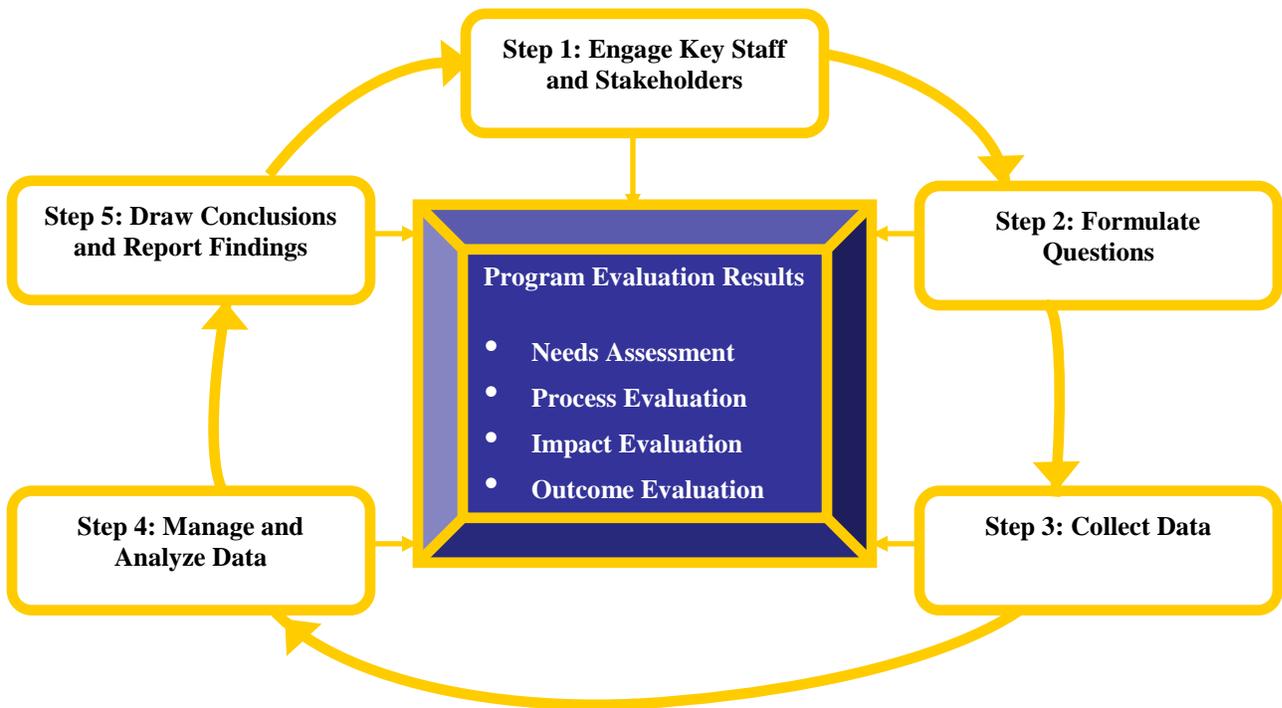
4. FRAMEWORK FOR DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

This section of the report presents a conceptual framework for a systematic and integrated data collection and management plan that can function as the communications data-monitoring program (DMP) to address the evaluation needs of the OSPPC. This framework is a modification of a widely-used logic model for program evaluation, which has been adapted for

use by Aspen for similar projects.³⁵ It has been tailored to provide a fundamental structure to guide improvements in data collection and evaluation of communications services for the PICB.

An effective DMP will help maximize resources and improve production, efficiency, and accountability. Note that the term “data-monitoring” is used broadly to encompass the entire cycle of data management (measurement, management, analysis, reporting) as illustrated in **Exhibit 1** below. The data that are monitored are used to provide feedback on the communications services provided by and through the OSPPC, particularly by the PICB. Feedback provides the opportunity for continued refinement and improvement of services.

Exhibit 1. Data Collection and Management Evaluation Process



³⁵ **REFERENCES FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1999). *Framework for program evaluation in public health*. MMWR 1999; 48 (No. RR-11). Atlanta, GA.

National Network of Libraries of Medicine. (2000). *Measuring the difference: Guide to planning and evaluating health information outreach*. Bethesda, MD.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). *Making health communication programs work*. Washington, DC.

Using the findings of this study as well as key concepts in the areas of evaluation and data management, Aspen identified critical elements of a proposed DMP for the OSPPC. Four key steps in the DMP process are presented in more detail in the following sub-sections:

- Formulate questions
- Collect data
- Manage and analyze data
- Interpret and report findings

4.1 Formulate Questions

The OSPPC (and members of the former Office of Communications) have participated in the exercise of generating research questions that the data on communications services must address. Engaging in the activity of drawing explicit links between what you *need to know* and what information you *need to collect* is the first step in developing an evaluation plan. Not only does this process delineate how the Office will use the data to meet its needs, it also is the context in which data limitations are encountered and reconciled. For example, as much as the OSPPC may be interested in assessing whether recipients of information make a behavioral change (i.e., consult a physician), available data (i.e., process data) make it difficult to answer this question. During this stage, the planning group must ask:

- What are the objectives of this data collection?
- What information is needed?

Overarching research questions that have an impact on decision-making within an organization devoted to information communications and dissemination include the following:

- Are the communications services of high quality?
 - Is the information provided accurate?
 - Is the information delivered in a timely way?
 - Is the format of information dissemination appropriate and acceptable?
- Are users satisfied?
- Is NIMH perceived as a knowledgeable and authoritative source of information?
- How will the information be used?
- If NIMH cannot address the request, how can the inquirer be re-directed?

4.2 Collect Data

Effective data collection requires some degree of *standardization* across sources. In its evaluation activities, NIMH has already recognized the value of a consistent approach to identifying key variables that makes cross-database comparison and analysis more feasible. As illustrated in **Table 2** above, not all research questions (or outcomes) can be addressed by every data collection source. However, the process of *linking data source and research question* will have an impact on all phases of data-monitoring.

Key questions to keep in mind during this stage include:

- **When should the data be collected?** This question addresses the frequency of data collection – *This question ties in to the question being asked by the data and the identified need for these data, which has an impact on management and reporting.*
- **Who should collect the data?** This involves addressing the impact of the data collection on staff and resources – *The effort will not succeed if staff and other resources are not available to monitor and manage the data collection.*
- **How should the data be collected?** A range of critical issues pertain to this question, including the following:
 - Volume of data collection – *Samples of data may be all that is required to address some research questions.*
 - Complexity of the data collection – *The parsimony is relevant as it may be easier to manage more simple data collection as long as they address the question of interest.*
 - Flexibility/adaptability of the data collection – *Is it possible that these data can be manipulated to address multiple research questions? How adaptable is the data collection to both simple and complex enhancements?*
 - Quality of data collection – *Failure to consider this factor may result in findings that are not valid; quality is an issue that applies throughout the data-monitoring process.*
 - Usefulness of the data collection – *Periodic review of the usefulness of data contributes in many ways to effective data-monitoring and resource utilization.*
 - Cycle of data collection – *How does the data collection correspond to other “cycles” that are regular and predictable within the organization or within the field?*
 - Relationship of data collection to other data collection efforts – *This pertains to issues of data standardization, as well to overall centralization and integration within the organization as a whole.*

The OSPPC should evaluate each of data collection efforts against these criteria to ensure that the data continue to meet their needs and are not excessive or redundant; which has an impact on management and resources. Attention to these factors will equip staff with the ability to more quickly formalize and integrate new collection efforts, such as periodic surveys of consumer satisfaction or intermittent focus groups. The frequency of data collection will be dependent on the purpose for which the information is needed (e.g., periodic assessment of whether target audiences are finding the information they need; collection of specific suggestions related to modification of Website feature; suggestions for improvement to a particular communication service).

4.3 Manage and Analyze Data

Effective data analysis is driven by the overarching goals of the evaluation, the research questions to be addressed, and the anticipated outcomes. Since the OSPPC staff will have already formulated research questions (as described in Section 4.1), managing and analyzing the

data can be planned and executed fairly easily. The key question during this phase of the cycle is simply:

- **How will the data be analyzed?** In a well-designed evaluation, the selection of appropriate analysis techniques is initially addressed when research questions are formulated.

Descriptive statistics will be used most commonly to address the research questions presented in **Table 2**. For example, if the OSPPC wants to address the research question “*What are the characteristics of users?*” a frequency count will be conducted for the different types of individuals (e.g., self, family, friend, professional, other).

Within the PICB, as within most other government organizations, contractors play a large role in data collection activities. Data management tasks, such as database development and data cleaning, are often handled by an external entity with specialized expertise in these areas. The same is true of data analysis activities, as driven by the explicit research questions and outcomes identified in the data collection planning phase.

4.4 Interpret and Report Findings

Once the data are analyzed, project participants will reflect on the results and make plans for communication and dissemination of findings. Thus, this stage addresses the following questions:

- **What is the meaning of the evaluation results?** Stakeholders will address whether the findings support their original research hypotheses, how they answer the initial research questions, and implications for decision-making. During this period the value of the data collection and lessons learned begin to be addressed.
- **Who needs to know this information?** The issue of who has a stake in the findings should also be addressed when asking why the data collection is being conducted, during the formulation of research questions.
- **What are the best methods for disseminating this information?** Dissemination method will vary by communication channel and intended audience.

While interpretation of results may be necessary to add meaning and context to the findings, often the PICB can meet its reporting requirements using standardized reporting formats; particularly for those reports which are routine components of the overall data-monitoring program. Based on valuable reports and potentially useful data, NIMH and the OSPPC, specifically, could consolidate all information onto a brief summary report to be distributed across interested staff so that they can use the information to make communications, outreach, or policy decisions. Familiarity with report structure and a consistent reporting schedule will allow staff to anticipate and better utilize the information.

Variables to consider in the formulation of standard report templates:

- Content of report.
- Format of report (does it facilitate comprehension of findings; i.e., successes).
- Frequency of reporting (regular intervals, rapid response to media or congress).
- Audience(s) for the report.
- Relationship between/integration across reports (i.e., integration of findings across reports on a quarterly basis).

Regardless of audience, the report should be an authoritative representation of evidence-based findings related to usage and users of the NIMH communication services.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DATA-MONITORING PROGRAM

The data collection activities conducted within PICB, which require a range of technical, managerial, and communications skills, currently lack some direction and attention to key elements required for a meaningful and ongoing evaluation approach. This section provides some specific recommendations for the OSPPC to consider in implementing the DMP. While the OSPPC is interested in a framework for its data collection and evaluation activities, some specific action steps can be called out to help make it happen. Section 5 provides a discussion of the following recommended steps:

- Engage key NIMH staff and stakeholders in evaluation planning.
- Create a working group dedicated to evaluation plan implementation.
- Develop or refine tools to collect appropriate information and data.
- Develop database for data storage and retrieval.

Step 1. Engage Key NIMH Staff and Stakeholders in Evaluation Planning

Change is more likely if plans are communicated, and key staff and stakeholders play a role in defining issues and action steps. As the full impact of a reconfigured approach to data collection and evaluation may not be immediately evident, key staff should be kept informed and involved to share in the successes of the new approach and to identify potential barriers or challenges. Staff not directly involved in the management of evaluation activities should nonetheless be made aware of their roles in the overall approach and should know how the communications services data are being used. This initial step should be relatively brief (less than 4 weeks) and take the following into consideration:

- **The identification of the OSPPC goals and objectives.** Implementing the DMP will allow the OSPPC to evaluate the appropriateness of its strategies and services in achieving desired goals and objectives. A review of the OSPPC goals and objectives, as well as those of the NIMH as a whole, will ensure that communications activities are aligned with overall goals and objectives. Activities that do not meet objectives may need to be refined, modified, or

discontinued. Developing measurable objectives will help in the process of evaluating whether or not they are being met.

- **The formulation of research questions to be addressed by the data collection effort** (as discussed in Section 4.1 above).
- **The alignment of evaluation goals with available staffing and resources.** The scope of the DMP framework is multi-faceted and its adoption and implementation requires a range of skills and expertise that is available within the PICB, despite some current voids in staffing. Expertise is needed in database/systems development and management, evaluation research, and communications research. Outside experts may be consulted to ensure that all issues are addressed during the early phases of the evaluation plan.

Step 2: Create a Working Group Dedicated to Evaluation Plan Implementation

Once key staff and stakeholders, goals and objectives, research questions, and a realistic set of resources have been identified, roles will need to be clearly defined and responsibilities will need to be assigned. Based on the document review and key informant interviews, it is evident that the amount and type of data available to NIMH and the OSPPC varies widely. In order to execute the DMP smoothly, each staff involved must know his/her role and responsibilities to maximize productivity. For example, a working group should be responsible for identifying the particular information or data to be collected so that it is appropriate and sufficient for evaluation.

This small working group could be responsible for implementation of the plan as well for ongoing monitoring of its challenges and successes. This group will design the “approach to data collection and management that is centralized, systematic, adaptable and responsive” as described above in Section 4. Furthermore, working group participants will be invested in ensuring that the findings are utilized to “provide feedback for improvement and to inform decision making.” They will monitor the impact of staff, cultural, and organizational changes on the data-monitoring plan, as well as how satisfactorily it meets the evaluation needs of the OSPPC. They will also provide oversight of program management to ensure that it does not become unwieldy and that staff members are adequately trained to meet the requirements.

Step 3: Develop or Refine Tools to Collect Appropriate Information and Data

Based on the findings of this study, a sample of data collection tools has been suggested to assist the working group in managing the data to ensure that they will have an impact on the decision-making process (see additional discussion of tool development in Section 3.1.1). A sub-task of the working group should be to formulate tools to aid in the display and interpretation of communications findings. Staff should be trained on the purpose and appropriate use of each tool.

Step 4: Develop Database for Data Storage and Retrieval

The information and data presented to the PICB should be entered in a database for electronic storage, retrieval, and possible analysis. The working group should agree on the type of database that is most widely used and user-friendly among those who will utilize the database. Microsoft (MS) Access® is a popular database that can automatically generate reports by various categories. MS Access® allows the user to perform queries (i.e., retrieve data from a table if the data satisfy the desired criteria). During the key informant interviews, one participant suggested a Web-based database that performs similar functions as those of MS Access® but can be seen and utilized by external organizations.³⁶

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As the office charged with the dissemination of information on mental illnesses and brain disorders, the OSPPC faces regular challenges in anticipating and responding to the needs of both the general public, the research and scientific community, the media, and Congress. To be proactive in the face of these communications challenges, the OSPPC is engaged in efforts to provide a more integrated, centralized and accountable approach to collection of data pertaining to communications services.

This report presents the findings of a communication services evaluation feasibility study, presents a framework for a data-monitoring plan tailored to the needs of the OPPSC, and provides some specific recommendations designed to put the plan into action. The purpose of this project was to develop an analytic approach to addressing research questions related to the communications activities and services conducted by and through the OPPSC. Key elements of the proposed framework include the following:

- Formulation of research questions to be addressed by the data collection effort.
- Approach to data collection and management that is centralized, systematic, adaptable and responsive.
- Plans to utilize the findings to provide feedback for improvement and to inform decision-making.

With emerging stability in its organization and staffing, the OPPSC is poised to adopt and implement a comprehensive approach to managing and utilizing its communications data.

³⁶ Through feedback on the draft of this report, it was learned that Circle prefers to use SQL Server for its interfaces, as it is a more appropriate, enterprise-level database that can be utilized by larger group and external organizations, and offers the flexibility of easy conversion of data into other formats for the production of customized in-house reports. Circle also provided information that the recommendations within this report – for electronic storage, retrieval, and analysis – are already in place, along with multiple Web-based databases that perform similar functions and are available to appropriate external entities.