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The latest on our new initiatives

## New hire aims to build “a data-driven culture” at NLS

David Spett recalls listening to an NLS talking book about President Dwight D. Eisenhower with his grandfather on one of the bulky C-1 cassette machines that were the workhorse of the NLS program from the 1980s until 2010. His grandfather had become a patron in his later years after suffering a stroke. “He loved to read,” Spett said, “and the NLS program allowed him to continue to soak up information.”

Now Spett has been hired as NLS’s first data analyst. In announcing his arrival in March, Director Karen Keninger said his role would be “improving our data systems and building a data-driven decision-making culture.”

It’s not exactly the career path Spett saw himself on when he graduated from Northwestern University in 2008 with a double major in journalism and legal studies. There he had worked with the journalism school’s famed Medill Innocence Project, which investigated claims of prisoners who said they were railroaded by the justice system. He went on to become a legislative reporter in Pennsylvania, then worked for three years with a program that trains college journalists.



NLS data analyst David Spett

“I liked journalism—I still do,” he said. “But I like many other things, like running projects and working with data.”

His wide-ranging interests led him to get an MBA from Yale University, after which he worked in policy and data analysis jobs for the National Park Service, the White House Office of Management and Budget, and the Defender Services Office of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts.

Spett said he is particularly interested in “the marriage of quantitative data and qualitative decision-making. You can’t look at quantitative data in a vacuum. . . . I like to think about what data to collect, how to collect it, and how systems are developed.”

Among the NLS projects he was immediately tasked with is planning how to collect data on the braille eReader pilot project. Analyzing the cost of developing the next-generation talking-book player is another of his projects.

Spett also has been working with Network Consultants Pam Davenport and MaryBeth Wise to learn more about the data that NLS network libraries collect. In the coming year, “I want to develop relationships with our libraries so I can ask them directly—and they can ask me—about data,” he said.

Keninger is excited about the ways that having an on-staff data analyst will improve operations at NLS.

“The addition of a dedicated data analyst to the NLS team will allow us to do so much more with the information we already collect about our services,” she said. “Analytics will help us strategize and build better processes to enhance patron service. We’re already gaining insights from side-by-side comparisons of data and we know that the benefits will only increase as we track trends over time.”

Watch for the next issue of *On the Move* in your inbox on June 27!