HANDBOOK CHAPTER: LIBRARY ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

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Library Assessment and Reporting

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1. Introduction: Why Assess

Assessment and reporting refers to the collective means by which the library measures its efficacy in the community it serves. While the primary mission of the library is the delivery of information to our patrons and stakeholders, it is also information about the library that justifies our continued existence. The current assessment procedures adopted by this organization dictate that the library evaluates itself both internally as well as externally. This means that we must collect data on our institution's operational structure, and functions, in addition to developing data sets on our community, patrons, and similar institutions. A library might be looking internally, trying to decide if a particular program is needed or is still effective. A library might compare itself to other libraries in its state, to see if the services, staffing and funding it is receiving is equitable to other libraries of similar size. Finally a library might analyze data about the community it serves, in order to make decisions about long range planning and development. The overall purpose of this data collection is to amass the evidence required to not only articulate those areas in which the library excels in servicing its patrons, but also to determine where it can be improved.

2. What to Assess

Keep your own library needs and strategic planning in mind when developing your library's specific assessment goals. However, the following is a list of common metrics to track while collecting assessment data. The list is by no means complete, and instead offers a baseline of what information should not be neglected, rather that a complete list of everything that can be assessed.

Door counts

Door counts refer to the practice of maintaining statistical data on how many patrons visit the library each day. These counts may be achieved manually or mechanically. Manual door counts are typically accomplished by stationing a library employee at the public entrance, followed by physically counting how many new patrons enter the library on a given day. Hand-held tally counters make this task easier. If your library is lucky enough to have sensor operated automated traffic counters built into its entrance doors or metal detectors, this can alleviate the labor required to later draft reports on the actual counts recorded.

Circulation statistics

Circulation statistics provide the library with information about its collection and how it is being utilized. This can include, but is not limited to, total volumes in the collection, a breakdown of different formats in the collection, how often each volume is circulated, when a volume was last checked out, acquisition information, de-accessioning information, and inter-library loan requests and fills.

Reference interactions (in person, virtual, email)

Assisting patrons with requests for information, formally known as the reference interaction, is one of the primary duties of a librarian. This interaction can take place in a traditional interview at the reference desk or in the stacks, but also through phone calls, chat services, email, and even social media. Tracking how many interactions take place, as well as the nature of the reference inquiry can help the library forecast the needs of its patron base and implement changes to address those needs.

Computer usage

For some users, the library offers the only access point to technologies like word processing, printing, and the internet. Providing these services is often one of the most expensive parts of a library's budget. Assessing the usage of the library's technology resources allows the library to demonstrate need in funding acquisitions, as well as make important resource allocation decisions pertaining to licensing, equipment, and floor space.

Programming (programs offered, attendance)

Libraries are as much centers for civic engagement as they are repositories for information services. As such, a great deal of the work of a modern librarian is the development of programming opportunities to provide a space for classes, readings, crafts and other activities to the community. Keeping a record of the different program offerings of the library, their attendance, and their reception by the public is an important part of justifying the library's impact on its community.

Weeding

Weeding data measures the number of volumes removed from the collection, the frequency of the culling, and even the descriptive information about the titles selected for removal. Assessment of weeding activities can help a library build a more effective collection and improve the overall efficiency of its collection development policy over time.

Library website hits/ Social media metrics

Inbound and outbound website traffic, as well as social media interactions (likes, comments, follows, reposts etc.) provide information about public interest in the library and its services. Inbound hits measures how many unique users are being routed to the library website as a destination for information, outbound hits measure how many of the library website users are being routed to outside sources through linking. This can be used to improve the overall effectiveness of the library's website for providing the final information that the patron is seeking. Social media metrics are perhaps a more subjective measurement of patron interest, for while objective information like views are similar to inbound website traffic, the addition of interactive data like user comments help to better contextualize the purpose for the patron's involvement with the library's digital presence.

Database Usage Statistics

Thanks to the academic publishing crisis, database subscriptions and licensing, as well as related consortia fees, often account for the single largest expense in library budgeting. Therefore, it is important to conduct regular assessments of database usage in order to justify the cost of these services, or potentially save money by dropping expensive subscriptions.

New card applications

Related to circulation statistics, new card applications are a metric tracking the library's ability to appeal to new patrons. This can be a measurement of how well the library is meeting the needs of its community, how its community demographics have been changing, or even how valuable the library is perceived by its community.

Budget and funding

Budget and funding assessments are perhaps the most visible and familiar of all standard organizational reporting. These terms refer to the collective itemized expenditure lists for either specific library programs, individual departments, the library as a whole, or any gradation in-between. A more detailed discussion of budget and financing procedures can be found in the chapter titled *Budget, Finance, and Procurement.*

Census data

Census data is the collective descriptive information used to identify different demographics in a community. These include break downs of a population by topics like age, sex, ethnicity, education level, socio-economic status, and more. By assessing census data and building a community profile, the library can evaluate how it is or is not meeting the diverse needs of its patron base.

3. Who to Assess

Staff

Frontline staff members with the most patron contact will often have the best perspective on which policies, services, and programs are working and which are not. They may also be able to offer suggestions about what changes will be the most needed and the most effective in fulfilling the library's mission. If you are a staff member and you see an opportunity to improve library services, please speak to your department supervisor or the library director! Library staff members are expected to contribute to assessment and reporting by compiling census data and conducting community surveys, tracking reference interactions and interviews, moderating focus groups and other programming opportunities, and tracking library expenditures through the documentation and retention of budget requests.

Conversely, the productivity of an individual staff member in her role has an immediate impact on the library's productivity. Therefore, to determine staff efficacy as well as develop staff professionally, employees themselves will find their work evaluated as part of the assessment process. Informal employee evaluations will be conducted bi-annually, with a formal performance review conducted annually. Additional information on performance reviews may be found in the designated "Human Resources" chapter.

Users

Our library patrons and stakeholders are a valuable resource for assessment. Users can provide data indirectly in the form of usage statistics (titles checked out, ILL requests), as well as directly through complaints, suggestions, surveys, focus groups, and social media comments. Examples of usage statistics generated through the library facilities and systems include gate counts, circulation records, and web resource utilization. However, it is the responsibility of the library and its staff to invite patron input directly. Regular consultation of users is not only beneficial to the library's functionality; it is imperative.

Non-Users

It is important to monitor factors which may discourage library usage. Non-users impact the library and its patrons by contributing indirectly to the library's reputation as well as continued dialogue in the community we serve. Contact non-users through partnerships with other civic organizations or institutional resources in the community. Keep track of outreach programs like flyers, brochures, info-graphics, social media accounts, and press-releases, so that the library may measure how these efforts impact the library's presence in the community. The overall goal of reaching out to non-users is to provide an opportunity for the library to refocus services, so that it may better reach a new segment of the population.

4. How to Assess

The following is a list of resources for library assessment as well as an instructional framework by which to conduct assessments. Where possible, example forms have been provided, in addition to hyperlinks to external sources for additional information on the topics discussed within.

Census Data and Community Surveys

As libraries are often federal or state funded civic entities, they are subsequently responsible to their parent organizations for providing statistical information regarding their operations. The following is a list of government-initiated surveys reporting these values based on public or academic library designation. These data sets may be used to compare your library to others of similar size and function:

- Public Library Survey—PLS

This survey has been conducted annually by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) since 1989 and requires that public libraries in all 50 states submit their data. Over 9,000 public libraries are surveyed through state data coordinators and the resulting data is submitted to IMLS. Data is processed through the WEBPlus online platform, and includes information on library community demographics, staffing hours, budgeting, and catalog holdings, among others.

https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-united-states-survey/public-libraries-united-0

- Academic Library Survey—ALS

Similarly to the PLS, the Academic Library Survey (ALS) is produced by the U.S. Census Bureau for the NCES. Data collection began at non-standard intervals in 1966, and has been compiled every other year since 1990. The survey pools information retrieved from over 3,500 higher education institutions from across the United States and its territories, including campus branches that qualify for Title IV aid. The survey reports data relative to operating costs, staff numbers, collection holdings, circulation statistics, reference transactions, gate counts, and others.

https://www.census.gov/econ/overview/go1700.html

Additionally, it may be helpful for the library to conduct its own survey of relevant demographic data to address patron and community needs. Topics covered in the demographic survey may include: age, languages spoken at home, English language ability, ethnic makeup, family arrangements, largest area employers, access to broadband internet/computers, and area schools. To generate the data required, staff may consult resources such as the http://factfinder.census.gov website, as well as state and local resources (i.e. http://hawaii.gov statistical sites).

Sample Census Data Sheet: Pleasantville, CA	
Age	
Total Population	50,000
Under 5 Years	2,000
5-14 Years	5,000
15-19 Years	3,000
20-30 Years	10,000
30-50 Years	15,000
50-64 Years	10,000
65 Years and over	5,000
Language Spoken at Home	
Only English at home	30,000
Language other than English at home	20,000
Spanish and Spanish Creole	15,000
Other Indo-European Languages	1,000
Asian and Pacific Island Languages	4,000
Ethnic Makeup	
Total population	50,000
White	25,000
Black or African American	5,000
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,000
Japanese	4,000
Two or more races	10,000

Mexican	3,000
Other Hispanic or Latino	2,000

Automated Assessments

Library facilities and systems are equipped with methods of tracking traffic and usage information relevant to library effectiveness. These statistics, such as gate counts (how many patrons enter and exit the building daily), circulation, acquisition, and payment information (generated by the integrated library management system), database subscription uses, and incoming and outgoing website hits, are all useful in justifying the library's return on investment to state and local governments as well as granting bodies. Library management systems (LMS) record this information as it is generated, meaning that a good LMS will provide statistical data on library operations in addition to providing a public user interface for the library's catalog.

Sample systems include:

- WorldShare Management Services

An OCLC product consisting of multiple library management applications, WorldShare Management Services provides a cloud-based platform for generating localized reports on acquisitions, circulation, collections, and e-resources.

http://www.oclc.org/en-US/worldshare-management-services.html - analytics

- Koha

The first ever open-source ILS of its kind; Koha was developed in 1999 by Katipo Communications for the Horowhenua Library Trust in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Koha offers comprehensive reporting on holds, patron information, circulation, reserves, cataloging, accounting (fines, credits, etc), acquisitions, serials, and others.

https://koha-community.org/download-koha/

Staff generated (reference interview data)

Staff members are required to participate in regular collection of data related to the reference interaction. The librarian assigned to the reference desk during her or his shift will keep track of the count of how many reference interactions were conducted, as well as the origin of reference interactions through a simple tally sheet. Additionally, librarians are encouraged to file details on each reference query for later review. Details tracked include date of interaction, reference librarian on duty, estimated patron age, origin of reference question, actual reference question, library resources used, and time spent on the interaction.

Sample Reference Interaction Desk Count Sheet			
Date: 7/1/16	Telephone Inquiries	Walk-up Inquiries	Email Inquiries
Shift 1 Mary	\\\	\\\\	\
Shift 2 Steven	\\\\	\\\\ \\\\ \	\\
Shift 3 Alex	\	\\\\	\

Sample Reference Interaction Detail Log Entry	
Reference Librarian:	Date of Inquiry:

Origin of Inquiry (Circle One):			Est. Patron Age (Circle One):			
Phone	Walk Up	Email	0-5	5-12	14-20	20+

Reference Question:

Library Resources Used: (Circle All that Apply)		
Reference Collection	Serials (print)	Subscription Databases
Internet Search Engine	Government Website	Library Directory
Community Board	Community Rolodex	Library Fact Sheet

Adult Non-Fiction	Adult Fiction	Computer Lab
Juv. Non-Fiction	Juv. Fiction	Media Collection

Est. Time (Circle One):	< 5 min	5-15 min	15-30 min	>30 min

Budget reporting

Annual budgeting requests by department, as well as requests for program funding must be kept for a minimum of 5 years, or as prescribed by the institution's parent organization retention schedule. *For instructions on how to complete budgeting line item requests, as well as sample forms, please refer to the chapter titled "Budget, Finance and Procurement".* All budget requests must include detailed item descriptions, item counts, designated costs for individual line items, and total allotments requested. When possible, staff members are encouraged to provide vendor information for verification of purchase costs, as well as a budget narrative to justify the expenditure.

Focus groups

In the case of proposed new library programs, or prospective changes to library facilities and organization, community input can be gathered through the use of community focus groups. Advertisements may be placed within local library branches, as well as local businesses to recruit library stakeholders as focus group participants. Focus groups must be attended by at least two library staff members: preferably one librarian and one paraprofessional (library assistant or technician). One staff member will serve as moderator, and one as facilitator. Moderators will guide discussion on the focus group topic, taking care to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to voice their opinion and do so respectively. Facilitators will take notes on the discussion and notate any observations that may be pertinent to the focus group topic.

For helpful guidelines on how to conduct an effective focus group discussion, we suggest consulting the University of Wisconsin's Office of Quality Improvement's publication titles "Focus Groups: A Guide to Learning the Needs of Those We Serve."

http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Focus_Group_Guide.pdf

Surveys

The library may choose to integrate third party platforms to conduct surveys of library facilities and stakeholders. The benefit of using external surveys is that it allows the library to access reports which may then be used to evaluate how well it is servicing its users and meeting their expectations. Using this type of software alleviates staff of the time consuming burden required to conduct such comprehensive surveys. For user satisfaction inquiries, following the distribution of the survey through the library website or email list, responses are compiled in a vendor database and analyzed for library use before being delivered in a separate report. Similar to the user surveys, third party vendors can be used to analyze library-generated statistics. Example platforms include LibQUAL+ and LibPAS. LibQUAL+ is a product of the Association of Research Libraries, and functions as a means of allowing library administrators "to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality", through the use of its web based interface. LibPAS is a performance data management system utilizing internal performance metrics to analyze library efficiency.

- LibQUAL+

http://www.libqual.org/about/about_lq/general_info

- LibPAS

http://countingopinions.com/products/index.html

Suggestion boxes

A suggestion box is permanently installed at both the circulation counter and reference desk. The purpose of the suggestion box is to encourage ongoing conversation on areas of improvement for the library by its patrons. The suggestion box is to be regularly checked on a weekly basis, and suggestions are culled and filed for reference. Whenever possible, staff are encouraged to ask patrons who approach them with suggestions to also fill out the form and submit it. This is to ensure that their suggestions are documented and filed for consideration. Under no circumstances is the suggestion box to be used as a method of diverting constructive conversations about the library away from staff.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">Sample Suggestion Box Card</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Tell us how the library can better serve YOU!</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Tell us about yourself!</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">What brought you to the library today?</td><td colspan="2">Do you have a library card?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Research/ School</td><td>Check out books/media</td><td>Computers/ wifi</td><td>Just hang out!</td><td>YES</td><td>NO</td></tr>
</table>

5. When to Assess

The type of data collected depends on the purpose behind the assessment. Below are some examples of when a library might collect data:

Continually

Some types of data (e.g. circulation data, database usage, computer use) will be collected continuously, often by your integrated library system, your automated equipment (e.g. gate counts), or your website, social media, and database metrics. You should be able to generate reports of this data as needed. The purpose of maintaining ongoing reports on this type of data is to be able to identify patterns or cause and effect relationships between changes in library policy, programming, or operations and the resulting services and utilization by library patrons and stake holders. This is only achievable if the library has an ongoing documentation strategy for its basic functions, or in other words, if the library can provide a record of the "big picture".

Before/After Programming

Other data will be collected at selected times, such as before and/or after a program. You might be interested in the popularity or effectiveness of an information literacy program by measuring outcomes once a session has completed. It is important to conduct these reports as immediately as possible, so that the information recorded (especially the more subjective information such as patron responses and reactions) is still freshly available. This type of data collection can later prove valuable when the library needs to articulate its impact in the community it serves. By conducting programming assessments, the library can document, and more importantly demonstrate its value to funding agencies, vendors, granting bodies, and parent organizations.

Monthly/Quarterly

You might ask for departments to submit monthly or quarterly budget reports to get a better idea of how expenses are used at different times of the year. You might also want to analyze if certain programs or services are in demand at a particular time of year versus another. Monthly or quarterly reporting is valuable in that it recognizes and evaluates how the library is impacted by seasonal fluctuation, and often by outside influences like public school sessions, impending conferences or professional events, and current cultural or political phenomena. Like continuous reporting strategies, the regular submission of monthly or quarterly reports on issues like budget, staffing hours, and programming allows the library to better identify trends in its operation and anticipate necessary changes to run the library effectively. This is another example of making sure the library is able to present a "big picture" of how it functions, so that it is better able to justify and implement changes.

Annually

Most required reporting (public library survey, academic library survey) must be filed once a year or, sometimes, once every two years. Many libraries will also publish and annual report or a fact sheet annually. Many budgets are also reviewed annually. Annual reporting compiles the contiguous efforts of continuous, programming, and monthly/quarterly reporting strategies to deliver a cohesive and detailed description of library operations. This annual reporting schema is a valuable tool, not only when mandated by government agencies or parent organizations, but also to educate existing as well as potential library patrons and stakeholders on the services, changes, challenges, and successes the library has experienced over the course of the year. The published annual reports, surveys, and fast fact sheets often associated with annual reports can assist the library in applying for things like grant aid, special building allocation funds, and academic accreditation.

As needed

Libraries will also collect data as needed; such as in preparation for a big change like a building redesign, or for small changes like the introduction of new services and programming. They should also periodically assess their users and non-users community to make sure that the services and programs that are being offered are still desired and effective. These "as needed" types of assessment can include things like building and collections preservation assessments and community profiling.

6. Where to share what you Assess (Reporting)

Once all of the data has been collected from varied sources through the use of the diverse methods detailed above, the library must share that data in a meaningful way. The way a library shares its data will depend partly on what type of library it is, and partly on what type of message it wants to communicate to its intended audience. Some of the reports listed below are compulsory, mandated by particular government bodies or parent organizations; some are voluntary, and some represent the outcome of targeted marketing decisions. The important thing to remember is that you should consider assessment and reporting as two sides of the same coin: data is collected with the intention of sharing that same data with a specific report or unifying message in mind. It is critical that the library collects all data necessary for mandatory reports. Below are examples of the types of reports/products for which your library may need to collect data.

Library annual reports

These are required by law in most states to participate in and report on the Public Library Annual Survey PLAS (see Public Library Annual Survey below). They can also be distributed to boards of directors, university administrators, donors, and legislators to demonstrate the library's growth and effectiveness over the past year. This is a comprehensive document that should speak to all functions of library operations, showcase specific library successes, demonstrate alignment with the mission and vision of the library, and support the library's strategic planning goals and objectives.

Fast Fact Sheets

These reports are snapshot summaries of the Library Annual reports (see Library Annual Report section above). They should be succinct and highly visual with appealing graphics. This is not a comprehensive report but rather a highlight of the library structure, operations, and successes. The Fact sheet can contain a link to the more comprehensive Annual Report.

Public Library Annual Survey

Data for this survey is collected annually during December-August. Libraries report via a web based reporting system. The survey provides data for the Institute of Museum and Library Services. According to the Census Bureau "The data includes electronic resource users, Internet terminals, reference transactions, public service hours, interlibrary loans, circulation, library visits, size of collections, staffing, operating revenues and expenditures and number of service outlets."

Academic Libraries Survey

Data for this survey is collected every two years, in even years during November-March. Libraries report via a web based reporting system. The survey provides data for the National Center for Education Statistics. According to the Census Bureau "The data includes total operating expenditures, full-time equivalent library staff, service outlets, total volumes held at the end of the fiscal year, circulation, interlibrary loans, public service hours, gate count, reference transactions per typical week, and electronic services."

American community surveys

A searchable database of census collected data including information from the American Communities Survey, the Population Estimates Program, and the Decennial Census. This information is not directly collected by libraries but is useful in informing and guiding libraries in planning and decision-making. Data from this source can be incorporated into other library generated reporting.

Grant applications

Grant awarding organizations nearly always require the request for funding be accompanied by data detailing the value of the project as well as demonstrating significant financial need. The components of a grant proposal vary widely depending on the requirements prescribed by the granting body. Typically you should expect to include a history of your library or organization, a project narrative, detailed project goals, a timeline for completion, a line item budget, and a budget narrative. In each of these sections, you should be able to use data collected through your assessment procedures to provide evidence for your petition for funding. Information culled from your data collection can include objective numbers pertaining to things like staff hours and library expenditures, but do not discount the value of anecdotal evidence from things like programming assessments and community surveys.

This type of information can help you contextualize your hard data, and write a more compelling argument for why your project deserves to be funded in your narrative sections.

Funding requests

Requests for additional funding from the board, legislature, dean, or other library governing body, should always be accompanied by appropriate data. Statistics that show effectiveness of a particular program or that can demonstrate the need for additional equipment or services makes your argument more effective. Choose the data you include to enhance your position.

Non-profit research and articles

Certain non-profit groups (ALA groups, Pew Report, Aspen Institute) may collect, report or ask you to supply data for research or reports that they are spearheading. Often these groups are library friendly, and cooperating with them by providing data will both increase visibility for your library as well as increase community support and awareness.

Community outreach

The regular distribution of library information to organizations with whom you have created partnerships (e.g. retirement homes, homeschool groups, schools, hospitals, homeless shelters) and to groups for whom the library has targeted a particular service or program (e.g. homeless, children, homeschoolers, elderly, non-English speakers), can impact the library's profile in the community it serves. By maintaining transparency about the library's strategic planning, programming, and upcoming initiatives, this creates a dialog with the public and engenders a sense of value for the library's place in the community. The following are suggestions for reporting assessment information to the public, as well as reaching out to the public at large.

Library brochures, flyers, newsletters, posters, and websites

Ephemeral publications such as brochures, flyers, and newsletters can be a simple but powerful means of communicating information to dedicated stakeholders. These are effective ways to distribute information that is short lived. Create and post flyers around the library, local shopping outlets and community centers, and in target demographics like local schools. Bookmarks or brochures can feature information about joining summer reading programs, or create an informal readers advisory interaction by showcasing recommended titles (think YALSA Teen Top Ten). Make a sign or banner showcasing an upcoming community event being hosted in your library to draw in casual interest. Information about important non-library happenings can be distributed to your community by using the library's standing as a civic resource. Info-graphics and newsfeeds about current events can be presented to the public through the library's website as well as physical presence. As our society increasingly seeks digital sources of information as a primary resource, it is important that the library maintain a web presence through the use of a designated website.

Steady updates to the website helps to not only provide quick access to general information like hours of operation, but also a forum to report statistical information and programming initiatives to the public.

Social media

Social media is not only an effective way to report or market information, it is a necessity for keeping the library relevant in the current information economy. As part of your job duties, you may be required to create and manage social media accounts on the library's behalf. As this is a representation of the library image in the greater public sphere, it is important to maintain integrity in each post. Keep posts short, adding photos/images when possible, and keep the message professional. To assess the overall effect of the social media accounts, library staff should be expected to submit data on such interactions as: account followers, individual post likes and shares, and responses to posts. In turn, social media offers yet another designated place to share library successes and vital statistics to keep stakeholders informed.

Press releases

You may be responsible for creating press releases for the library to either market an event or program or to respond to a situation or event. Press releases can often be a way of reaching beyond your existing base of regular patrons and contributing stakeholders. Follow guidelines for creating a press release and/or use the ALA press release template, available at:

http://www.ala.org/conferencesevents/2013-national-library-week-sample-press-release

All press releases must include the following information:

- Event title
- Intended release date
- Event dates
- Contact information of library director/program coordinator
- Detailed description of event activities
- Library branch name and location
- Library contact information