

National Library Services Trends

NLST – UD1: Interpreting Community Data to Make More Effective Decisions

Collecting, interpreting, and utilizing data effectively and correctly can make the difference between the library that weathers tough economic times and one that fails to survive.

A rising number of libraries have found that traditional data collection tools such as focus groups and community surveys are inadequate, or even inaccurate in relating the needs and wants of a community. Instead, library systems are using something called GIS (Geographic Information System) based marketing segmentation to analyze the people in their community. This sort of data collection provides:

- Demographic, socioeconomic, and residential information linked to where people live;
- Interests, buying habits, and leisure time activities;
- Strategies for communicating with specific audiences

This type of data collection helps library officials differentiate between their *perceptions* (which are often incorrect) of community members (both users and non-users) and the reality of community members. Thus, allowing them to make better decisions about budgeting, staffing, programs, and collection development.¹

Implications for JCPL

- JCPL should explore market segmentation tools available – designed specifically for libraries.
- Research could provide improved insight into non-library users and a macro view of community trends.
- Trained staff members (or consultants) for collection, analysis and presentation of data would be necessary.
- Review existing operations and procedures.
- Data product could be useful for community and possibly eligible for grant funding.

¹ Futterman, Marc et. al., "From the Heartland to Sin City: The Customer First Revolution" (presentation, PLA Midwinter Conference, Philadelphia, PA, March 16, 2012).

National Library Services Trends

NLST – UD2: Adapting Supply & Demand Dynamics to Public Library Planning

In order to compete in today's economic environment, many libraries are adapting business concepts to operations. One of these is implementing a supply/demand-based approach. Rather than offer programs that reflect our own interests or those of other librarians, a supply/demand model focuses on what patrons are interested in learning, doing, and making. This cuts the fat from programming schedules and improves attendance records. Some examples of revamped programs would be:

- Resume workshop vs. Scrapbooking workshop
- World Language classes vs. Travel Club programs
- AV production workshops vs. Movie Nights

Along with refocusing programs, the supply/demand model means weeding out materials that patrons are not using – even if that means getting rid of “classics.” If following a strict supply/demand model, libraries would stock only what patrons are most requesting. This model would be blended with a continued use of professional discretion when making collection development decisions.

In order to revamp a library's model, extensive research needs to be done, using “market segmentation” that will reveal exactly what patrons want and need from their public library.²

Implications for JCPL

- Librarians should make program evaluation an established procedure.
- Library should utilize CollectionHQ to perform collection analysis based on usage data.
- Staff members must be trained to use new evaluative tools.
- Differentiate between the impact marketing and content has on program attendance.
- Explore other business concepts that might be applicable to library model.
- Librarians should be aware of appropriate instances to use professional judgment regarding offering new services to community.

² Reardon, Siobhan A., “Making Business Intelligence Work for Libraries: How Patron Driven Consumer Research will Improve User Experience,” (Presentation, PLA Midwinter Conference, March 16, 2012).