GETTING STARTED WITH

EVALUATION

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CONTENTS

FIGURES, TABLES, AND TEXT BOXES

Figures

Tables

Text Boxes

PREFACE

With all of the developments occurring today in evaluation and the link-age of that topic with accountability, evidence-based decision making, and strategic planning, the average library manager, especially if working in small organizations, may be overwhelmed and unsure where to start and how to gather and use the resulting data. Further, most likely, if that person graduated from an accredited master's program in library and information science, he or she did not take a course, required or elective, in research methods or evaluation research. Today, library managers can hear and read about topics such as metrics, accountability, return on investment, and value, but without a background in evaluation research, they may feel overwhelmed and unsure how to proceed and what the staff should be doing.

Getting Started with Evaluation guides library managers through assorted topics: planning and decision making (chapters 2 and 4), types of metrics relevant to the organization (chapters 3–5), customer expectations: satisfaction and service quality (chapters 6–7), return on investment and value (chapters 8–9), and using and communicating evidence gathered (chapter 10). Chapter 1 introduces evaluation and chapter 11 provides a series of ten reminders for managers engaged in evaluation and using the results. Each chapter includes directed exercises to help

readers apply the content, and the "Appendix" and "Selected Readings" sections at the end of the book offer answers relevant to the exercises and key readings, respectively.

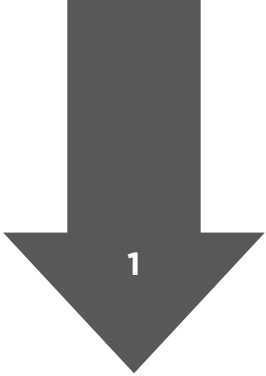
For the evaluation topics covered in this book, we advise readers on relevant source material they can use, and we alert them about how to collect evidence. The goal is the presentation of strategies that do not require a sophisticated understanding and application of a complex research process. As librarians review what they want or need to know and sources of evidence, they should remember that they want to portray the library in the life of customers and communities, and not others in the life of the library. In other words, libraries need to view themselves from the perspectives of others.

Accountability focuses on planning, evidence-based decision making, and demonstrating to stakeholders the effective and efficient use of resources, financial and other, to meet the organizational mission and that of the parent institution or organization. Service or program improvement—better service to constituent groups—adds another dimension to evaluation as managers engage in benchmarking and apply best practices. Clearly, a focus on both accountability and service improvement is part of managing organizations in the twenty-first century. To do both effectively more academic and public libraries need to invest in management information systems that enable their managers to communicate with stakeholders important to the library.

In summary, *Getting Started with Evaluation* addresses two questions:

1. What might library managers do that they are not currently doing?
2. How do they do those things?

To help address both questions, this guide relies on the knowledge and experiences of three writers on the application of evaluation to the management of academic and public libraries. It is our expectation that our approach will make this book of value to library managers in academic and public libraries, be they directors, members of the senior management team, or at other levels of management, as well as members of governing boards and others wanting to adopt any of the concepts presented in a given library. We also think management and research courses in schools of library and information science will find the content useful.



EVALUATION

Librarians today are somewhat familiar with terms such as evidence-based decision making, accountability, change management, learning organizations, and strategic planning. Such terms assume added importance as library managers cope with decreased resources but elevated customer and community expectations, view technology as a change agent, and create sustainability, the capacity to endure and add value to the lives of customers, stakeholders, and communities served. Stakeholders demand evidence that the resources allocated to libraries and their parent institution or organization are managed in a cost-effective or cost-efficient way and that libraries contribute to vital outcomes set by the institution or broader organization such as those dealing with student success and faculty research productivity. Further, as many library directors and others realize, most libraries are undergoing a transition and, it is hoped, moving from "surviving to thriving."[1] As Barbara I. Dewey explains, "Transition affords a library organization time and space to prepare for strategic directions needed in our complex global world. In reality we are

in permanent transition and, with the right approaches and tools, can grow and thrive in this dynamic environment."[2] Rush Miller adds,

> If our vision of the future is imperfect, it is better to be moving forward helping to define the future than to sit back, pat ourselves on the backs for how valuable we always were, and let that future move on without us. We cannot allow anything to deter us from creating the future for libraries that will maintain our relevance to the . . . mission of . . . [the parent institution or organization]. Even in a recession, we should seize the opportunities it affords us to question our traditions in light of the needs of our users in the digital age.[3]

Within this context, library managers need to monitor the organization's progress in making a transition to a vision of the future as laid out in planning documents while reviewing services and making adjustments as evidence dictates. They also need to go beyond anecdotes and assumptions while providing evidence of accountability, the obligation to be responsible for their actions and for the appropriate management of resources with which they have been entrusted. Accountability, therefore, should be a part of the organizational culture and the planning process: setting the direction ("what does the organization want to achieve?"), developing strategies to achieve that direction ("how will the organization achieve what it wants?"), monitoring performance ("how will the organization know how well it is doing?"), and, finally, repeating the cycle. Evaluation involves monitoring performance and using the evidence gathered to review and modify, as necessary, the direction set.

The Concept

Simply stated, evaluation is the process of identifying and collecting data about specific services or activities, establishing criteria by which their success can be measured, and determining the quality of the service or activity—the degree to which it accomplishes stated goals and objectives. As Peter H. Rossi, Mark W. Lipsey, and Howard E. Freeman explain, "The role of evaluation is to provide answers to questions about

a program [or service] that will be useful and will actually be used. This point is fundamental to evaluation—its purpose is to inform action."[4] As such, evaluation is a decision-making tool that is intended to assist library staff in allocating necessary resources to those activities and services that best enable the organization to accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives.

Types of evaluation activities include the following:

- Program or service planning, which focuses on "What is the extent and distribution of the target population?"
  - "Does the program or service conform with its intended goals?"
  - "Are the chances of successful implementation maximized?"
- Program or service monitoring, which centers on:
  - "Is the program or service reaching the persons, households, or other target units to which it is addressed?"
  - "Is the program or service providing the resources and other benefits that were intended in the project design?"
- Impact assessment, which addresses:
  - "Is the program or service effective in achieving its intended goals?"
  - "Can the results of the program or service be explained by some alternative process that does not include the program?"
  - "Does the program or service have unintended effects?"
- Economic efficiency, which covers:
  - "What are the costs of delivering services and benefits to program participants?"
  - "Does the program represent an efficient use of resources in comparison to alternative uses of the resources?"

Evidence gathered from evaluation is an essential aspect of organizational learning and is used for improving ongoing programs and services—continuous quality improvement (*formative evaluation*)—or reviewing completed programs and services (*summative evaluation*). That evidence can be used to distinguish between effective and ineffective aspects of the infrastructure (collections and services, staff, facilities, and use of technology) and to plan, design, and implement new efforts that are likely to have the desired impact on community members and

their environments. The evidence might be quantitative or qualitative, and measurement, which refers to quantitative evidence, assumes the collection of objective data describing library performance on which evaluation judgments can be based. It is important to remember that "measurement results are not in themselves 'good' or 'bad'; they simply describe what is."[5]

Planning Context

A number of excellent works address the planning process for libraries, one of which is *Strategic Planning and Management for Library Manag*ers, which discusses the process and relates the components of a strategic plan.[6] The plan sets the core direction to achieve the institutional or broader organization's mission while factoring in the vision or the long-term areas of concentration. Box 1.1 identifies the core directions of a plan. For each direction, the library can identify activities that can be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Although infrequently used in libraries, a strategic compass summarizes the key components of the plan that will be of interest to library managers and stakeholders. The compass might be placed on the home page in a prominent location, and, if stakeholders clicked on any part, the key underlying metrics are identified and given. The purpose of the compass is to visualize key elements of a strategic plan, without having to read and recall a written document. The metrics linked to the compass should be accompanied by a brief discussion of their significance and how they enable the organization to move forward. Figure 1.1 represents a compass that could be easily tailored to apply to other organizations.

Box 1.1

Core Directions

Enhance the User Experience

Foster environments in which staff provide resources, services, and programs that support learning, teaching, and research.

Objective 1.0: Develop and manage relevant intellectual content, balanced across appropriate information formats, to support teaching, research, and service regardless of geographic location.

Objective 2.0: Provide assistance to users seeking information, and . . . using the library and its resources, services, and programs.

Objective 3.0: Coordinate a comprehensive information literacy program that provides opportunities to demonstrate student learning outcomes in support of academic achievement, career success, and lifelong learning.

Objective 4.0: Support access to resources and productivity by deploying and managing information technologies including workstations, the online integrated library system, and the libraries' website.

Objective 5.0: Create and manage a flexible, functional, and inviting physical environment that supports all forms of learning, discovery, exchange, and instruction.

Enhance Institutional Effectiveness

Objective 6.0: Provide administrative structure and support to manage and achieve the strategic objectives of UWF and the UWF Libraries.

Objective 7.0: Demonstrate the libraries' value to the institution and other stakeholders.

SOURCE: University of West Florida, Libraries, "Strategic, Core Directions, July 1, 2011–June 30, 2014" (2011), http://libguides.uwf.edu/content.php?pid=188487&sid=1596741.

Figure 1.1 Strategic Plan Compass

University of West Florida, Libraries, "Strategic Plan Compass" (2011), http://libguides.uwf.edu/content.php?pid=188487&sid=2380550. This compass is adapted by permission of *Harvard Business Review*. From "Collective Ambition Compass" by Douglas A. Ready and Emily Truelove, *Harvard Business Review* 89, no. 12 (December 2011): 94–102. Copyright © 2011 by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, all rights reserved.

Evaluation Questions

Peter Hernon and Ellen Altman view measurement in terms of eleven evaluation questions that cover a range of metrics.[7] Figure 1.2 lists these questions, which can be divided into three broad categories: those

1. under the control of the library;
2. jointly decided by the customer and the library; and
3. decided by the customer (see table 1.1).

The "how questions" under the control of the library include:

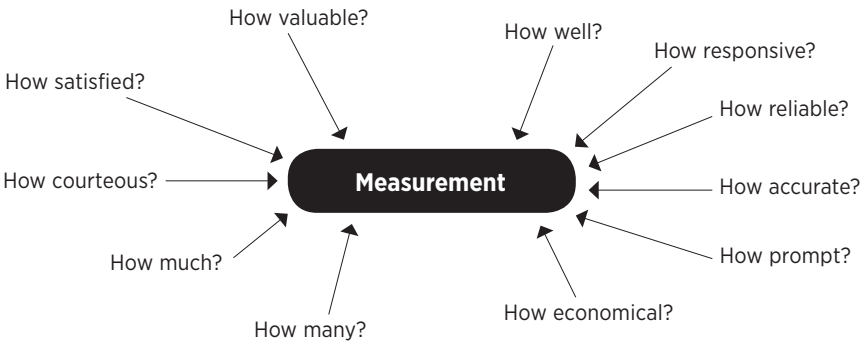


Figure 1.2 The "Hows" of Measurement

How much? The cost of providing a service should always be a concern for any library. All libraries (in fact, all organizations) are constrained by restrictions on resources. The resources budgeted for a particular service, be they personnel, space, collections, and so forth, determine in large part the quality of service that is planned to be delivered.

How many? Counts of various activities and processes help determine the "How many" questions. Daily, weekly, monthly counts of circulation, reference questions, people attending programs, number of items cataloged, and so forth, are examples of "how many." Such measures are often used to justify staffing levels by showing funding decision makers how busy staff members are. These counts are sometimes referred to as workload metrics.

A library can determine what percent of its community it reaches by comparing the number of registered cardholders against the total population of the community. Such a metric is often referred to as market penetration. Perhaps an even more helpful metric, sometimes called percent of active customers, compares the percent of registered library cardholders who have used the library in some way over the last month, quarter, or year to the total number of registered cardholders. In addition, use counts have been used historically as a surrogate measure for the value of the library.

Table 1.1
Components of the "How" Questions

LIBRARY CONTROL			
How much?	**How many?**	**How economical?**	**How prompt?**
Magnitude Percent of change (compared to last year) Percent of overall change Costs	Magnitude Change	Resources used Units processed	Cycle times Turnaround time Anticipatory
LIBRARY AND CUSTOMERS DECIDE			
How valuable?	**How reliable?**	**How accurate?**	**How well?**
Effort expended Cost-benefit obtained	Dependability Access Accuracy Currency	Completeness Comprehensiveness	Accuracy Performance meeting expectations Expertise
CUSTOMERS DECIDE			
How courteous?	**How responsive?**	**How satisfied?**	
Attentive Welcoming	Anticipatory Helpful Empathetic	Expectations met Materials obtained Personal interaction Ease of use Equipment used Environment (facilities) Comfort Willingness to return/use again	

That is, the more the library is used, the more valuable the collections and its services are to the individuals in the community. It is not unusual for a library's annual report to include multiple use metrics touting the popularity of the library.

How economical? This type of metric, usually referred to as an efficiency metric, combines cost data with count or use data.

Efficiency metrics answer the question: Are we doing things right? The results identify the cost per use or transaction. Examples of such metrics include the cost to add an item to the collection, the cost to catalog an item (copy cataloging versus original cataloging), and the cost to lend an item. Efficiency metrics are often used to compare the operations of one library against the performance of a group of peer libraries in a process usually referred to as benchmarking. In this time of fiscal constraints, it is important for a library to demonstrate that it is operating efficiently.

How prompt? Time, the foundation for this type of metric, conveys the speed with which an activity or transaction is completed. Examples include the elapsed time to order and place an item on the shelf, the length of time to catalog an item, and the amount of time to fulfill an interlibrary loan request and to wait in a checkout line. Time may be expressed in terms of minutes, hours, or days depending on what is being measured. Relevant data may be found in the automated library system in the form of a report or it may be necessary to gather time-related data using a sample of transactions.

There are several "how questions" that both the library and the customer decide. These include:

How valuable? The dominant approach to determining the value of the library is *value-in-use* as determined by the user of the service. The individuals using the service set the value of the service they receive. The benefits that arise from the use of the service occur first to the individual user. The possible benefits are categorized as being direct benefits (cost saving, time saved, new revenue generated, and gained information or knowledge), indirect benefits (e.g., leading to better grades in school, passing the GED, doing better on graduate aptitude tests, getting better jobs, graduating sooner, and generating new ideas), and nonuse benefits (someone can use the library at a later time or others in the community can use the library). The value of the library from a financial viewpoint is explored in greater detail in chapter 8, while chapter 9 discusses the value of the library from a nonfinancial perspective.

How reliable? There are several components of reliability, the most important of which is consistency. Customers develop a mental model of the quality of service they are likely to receive at the library. When their interaction with staff produces inconsistent results—some staff are helpful and some are not—the individual becomes frustrated. Another dimension of reliability is consistency of access: Do customers find the materials on the shelf that they are interested in, or can they locate an Internet computer that is not in use? And is the quality of information provided consistently accurate and of high quality?

How accurate? Accuracy is often presumed to be fairly high and thus most libraries do not actively investigate it. Yet, accuracy problems contribute to customer frustrations when they are using a library. Data about accuracy might be gathered about OPAC searches, shelving of returned items in the collection, responses to reference queries, quality of cataloging records, and so forth. Typically a sample is used to gather data to answer the question of how accurate.

How well? By seeing the library as contributing to the success and goodness[8] of the broader institution or organization, another how question addresses the impact of the program or service on its target audience: How great is the impact: the changes in the behavior, skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of customers attending a program or using a service? This question more fully addresses outcomes. Impact evaluation provides feedback to help improve the design and content of programs and services. In addition to providing for improved accountability, impact evaluations are a tool for dynamic learning, allowing policymakers to allocate funds better across programs and services.

The "how well" question suggests how closely the library meets or exceeds its goals or objectives. Perceptions of how well a library is doing will likely vary (often considerably) depending on whether staff or the customer is asked. The most important consideration is the customer's viewpoint. Answering the "how well" question is, in almost all cases, a subjective answer, but, nevertheless, it is an important perspective.

Another important viewpoint for the "how well" question pertains to how customers benefit from using the library. For an academic library, the focus might be on identifying metrics related to student-learning outcomes. In a public library, outcomes might include the number of people attending instructional classes who pass the GED exam, the number of individuals attending a series of programs about entrepreneurship who actually start a local business in the 18–24 months following the last program, and so forth.

And the "how questions" that are in the sole domain of the customer are:

How courteous? Customers come to the library with a set of expectations, including those about staff courteousness. Customers compare their expectations with the quality of service they actually receive. If the actual service does not meet expectations then the customer is disappointed and perhaps frustrated. The customer might be pleasantly surprised when the quality of service exceeds their expectations. Over time, customers build a mental model of expectations, and library staff, with training, can become sensitive to meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Another aspect of courtesy is whether the customer is greeted when entering or leaving the library.

How responsive? Responsiveness can be considered from two perspectives: how well the library has thought ahead to provide solutions to potential problems before they arise, and how well the library responds to a problem after it has arisen. For example, assuming the library charges fines, can customers pay using cash as well as credit cards? Can they easily determine what copies are theirs if multiple customers are using a shared printer? Staff helpfulness in resolving problems or providing a service is one manifestation of responsiveness. Staff members who actively assist the customer in finding (or attempting to find) something in the collection are preferable to the staff member pointing in the direction where the resource is likely to be found (and leaving customers on their own).

How satisfied? The customer experience in using the physical or virtual library determines the level of satisfaction. Indicators of satisfaction

include the use of a service in an ongoing manner (repeat business), the willingness to encourage others to use the library, as well as the inclination to be an advocate for the library. An important consideration for any library is whether to collect customer satisfaction data on a regular but periodic basis or on an ongoing, daily basis. Regardless of the decision, it is important that the library management team read each comment that survey respondents make. Many surveys will have 30 percent or more of the respondents providing comments in response to open-ended questions.

In conclusion, not all of the eleven hows are of equal importance. Those of greatest importance are perhaps:

- How well?
- How valuable?
- How economical?
- How satisfied?

Still, libraries have traditionally focused on "How much?" and "How many?" Subsequent chapters in this book predominately address these six questions, with an emphasis on the first four. Note that "How courteous?" and "How responsive?," to some extent, might be considered in the context of satisfaction.

Sources of Evidence

There are a number of ways for a library to gather the necessary data to answer one or more of the how questions. Some of the evidence gathered might result from the application of evaluation research and formal data collection. However, it is important to recognize that to identify the impact of the library in terms of outcome metrics, it may be necessary to identify the specific individual who has used a library service (e.g., borrowed materials, downloaded journal articles, and attended programs). The resulting data (with the unique identification number of the library customer) is maintained until such time as it can be combined with other data (e.g., student demographic and performance data) and the personal identification number can be stripped in order to protect customer confidentiality.[9]

Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate this type of evidence relevant to measuring customer expectations, including customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. However, some sources of evidence for other chapters might not involve evaluation research and might rely, in part, on internal budgetary data (inputs showing the distribution of the budget to collections and services, staff, facilities, and technology; data that a group of libraries, perhaps ones perceived as peers, report; or usage data (outputs supplied by vendors, publishers, consortium, and individual libraries). If a library counts something, this activity may require evaluation research and a determination of the length of time for data collection, the accuracy of the data gathered, and the validity of the data collection process. It is possible to combine both budgetary and usage data and study economic efficiency such as by analyzing the return on investment. Further, customers or community members might be asked to participate in evaluation research to determine the value they assign to the use of the library.

In essence, the six how-questions can be addressed by using budgetary or usage data, or a combination of both. However, effectiveness and impact can be more complex and, when they address outcomes, the data may be qualitative and not so easily compared. Further, such data should not merely come from customer self-reports. In our view, librarians rely too much on self-reporting and far less on demonstrating what people actually do that they could not do before—the actual changes they have undergone (i.e., increased skills, changed attitudes or values, modified behavior, improved conditions, or altered status). Altered status might be gaining employment from attending library workshops about résumé preparation and employment opportunities.

Benchmarking and Best Practices

Benchmarking creates a point of reference against which something can be measured. Internally, benchmarking may be applied to evaluate services against performance standards, and it enables libraries to determine whether they are performing better than they did in the past. Expanding the focus of benchmarking, libraries might ask, “Are we performing better than our competitors?” Externally, with the collaboration of other libraries or organizations within local government,

benchmarking addresses a new question: "Are we performing as well as, or better than, other units on campus or in local government?"

Benchmarking can be undertaken in almost any area of organizational activity. The basic requirements are that key performance variables be identified, measured, analyzed, and compared to provide a basis for planned performance improvement. Benchmarking can also be applied internally to reflect change over time and changes in processes in order to determine whether service to customers improves.[10]

Best practices, on the other hand, refers to best management practices, meaning the processes, practices, and systems identified in different organizations that performed exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving their organization's performance and economic efficiency in specific areas. The goal is to reduce expenditures and improve operational effectiveness and efficiency.

Central to both benchmarking and best practices are change management, continuous improvement, and high-quality customer service. As leading organizations improve, they constantly look ahead and challenge themselves to perform better. In essence, they change and do not settle for the status quo. Benchmarking is not an end unto itself; rather, it should lead to the identification and enactment of best practices.

Concluding Thoughts

Planning is a critical activity for libraries as they embrace change and view the status quo as unacceptable. Anyone agreeing with Miller that the present, although full of challenges, represents an opportunity for change needs to create a vision of the future and work to achieve that possibility.[11] Planning for the future brings together those inside and outside the library; however, planning by itself is insufficient. Two questions arise: "How well is the library achieving that plan?" and "Does that plan require any adjustments?" Neither question can adequately be answered without someone carrying out evaluation activities and reviewing the evidence gathered to assess progress in achieving stated goals and objectives. Corrective action may be required. As a result, evaluation should become a daily activity, one focused on achieving the plan.

Exercises

Topic: Covering the reference desk is no longer an essential component of the work of a number of academic libraries as students use library services remotely or contact reference staff in ways other than approaching the reference desk with a question. Further, librarians are increasing their contact with students and faculty in course-related interactions such as through subject and course guides available on the library's website.

1. Given this situation what might be the focus of an evaluation study?
2. Is there a relevant literature on the topic?
3. If there is a decline in the number of reference questions asked, what types of questions do students and others ask?
4. Other than at the reference desk, how do students interact with reference staff? What is the number of these transactions?
5. Depending on the findings, are libraries pursuing other models of reference assistance, ones that provide service in a more timely fashion than the reference desk could ever provide and that focus on online contact with faculty and students?
6. The previous question links evaluation to planning. What are other models? Is one most appropriate to your library? If not, what do you do with the data gathered from questions 3 and 4?
7. Returning to the topic, which exercises are most relevant to a public library?

(Answers to these questions can be found in the "Appendix" at the back of the book. We encourage different members of a library staff to work on the exercises together and to discuss the results.)

NOTES

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11. See Miller, "Damn the Recession, Full Speed Ahead." See also Peter Hernon and Joseph R. Matthews, *Reflecting on the Future of Academic and Public Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2013).