PROMOTING PUBLIC LIBRARIES
Using Data and Advocacy to Build Support and Funding

RURAL LIBRARY ADVOCACY WORKSHOP | TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2006 | BOSTON, MA

Needs and Assets Assessment

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1933 - 1965

Present

What Is a Needs Assessment?

– Process of identifying needs and inventorying assets to move toward workable solutions that cause improvement

- Use appropriate assessment tools to identify those solutions
- Move toward planning; create goals/objectives from data gathered

– A method of formulating a plan for desired outcome

Why Do a Needs Assessment?

– To figure out how to serve your patrons and community better by making educated, positive changes to your library's services

- Outcome: Become a more important, relevant part of your community which can lead to increased funding, support, and local influence

- Outcome: Attract more patrons

Types of Library Needs Assessments

– Facility
  - Do we need a new facility?
  - Where, how big, how much, and when?
  - How much capital is already in place?

– Staffing
  - Do we have adequate staff to handle the demands of the community?

– Furniture and equipment
  - What do we need to serve the physical needs of our current and potential patrons (i.e., special needs populations)?
  - What do we have? How long will it last?

Types of Library Needs Assessments

- – Collection
  - What do users expect with regards to quality of the holdings?
- – Services
  - What services, features, and programs are integral to success?
  - What services are already in place or in progress?
  - What could we do better?
- – Public Access Computing
  - Do we need computers, Internet connections, or space?
  - Do we need training to better educate and assist our patrons?
- – Outreach
  - Who do we need to partner with to make it happen?

Needs Assessment Tools

- Interviews
- Assessing yourself against professional standards
- Analysis of statistics and records
- Suggestion box
- Information gathered from open meetings, forums, reports, and newsletters
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Continued quality control processes

How Do You Develop a Needs Assessment?

Think about What Libraries Already Do to Measure Needs

- Librarians do a lot to measure the needs of their community whether they know it or not
  - Examples: Suggestion box, community meetings, casual conversations with library patrons, etc…

Needs Assessment Process

– Understand the process

- Who will conduct the study?

- What kinds of information will be collected?

  – Historical development data

  – Geographic and transportation data

  – Demographic data

  – Economic data

  – Social, educational, cultural, and recreational data

  – Library service and user data

Needs Assessment Process

- How will the information be collected?
  - Key informants
  - Community meetings
  - Public records
  - Surveys
- How will the information be used?
- Learn about needs assessments standards from your state

Needs Assessment Process

– Determine whether you need a community profile

- Local government
- Geographic and demographic information
- Socioeconomic climate
- Education
- Information systems
- Recreational and cultural activities
- Community service groups

Needs assessment process

– Get help from online and community resources

- New Mexico state library templates
- Academic library examples
- Library association materials
- Public library examples
- Workshop resource section

Case Study #1: New Facilities Needs Assessment

– Problem: Current Aztec Library building was inadequate, and we needed to determine community needs for the new facility

Case Study #1: New Facilities Needs Assessment

- Designed survey to collect demographic and library user data

- Partnered with the utility department to include survey in utility bills, put survey in *Aztec Local News*, and made survey available to patrons in library

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Case Study #1: New Facilities Needs Assessment

– Needs assessment survey asked :

- Is the library an essential service? Does the library add to your quality of life?
- Do you use the library?
- If yes, how?
- If no, why?
- How often do you visit?
- What services would you like the library to provide or improve?
- Do we need a new library? Where?
- Would you support a user fee?

Case Study #1: New Facilities Needs Assessment

Key results:

- A vast majority of respondents said:
  - They considered the library to be an essential city service like fire and police protection or street maintenance
  - They saw the library as an essential part of the quality of life of the city
- Reference, children's books, and pleasure reading were the services most used
- Reference, services for children, business and community services, and meeting rooms were the most requested new services
- More than 75 percent of respondents thought a new library was needed, and over half were willing to support a user fee to keep or add new services

Case Study #1: New Facilities Needs Assessment

How the results were used:

– Compiled and presented to the City Commission as a leveraging tool to spur action on acquiring the funding for the proposed new library

– Used to push for a local election on the town's gross receipts tax to pay for the new construction and move (a $2.3 million project)

– Built new facility together with a family service center, a Boys & Girls Club, a junior college, and an alternative high school, including a technology center that serves these organizations and the rest of the community

  • Built community partnerships and positioned the library as a source of community and economic development opportunities to increase funding streams

  • Went from 2,300 square feet to 9,400 in the new facility

Case Study #2:
Teen Needs Assessment

– Problem: Wanted to attract more teens to the library to increase number of patrons and serve an underserved audience

Case Study #2:
Teen Needs Assessment

- Designed survey to collect demographic and library use data from teens

- Partnered with local junior high school to survey teens while they were in school to get a "captured" audience

Case Study #2:
Teen Needs Assessment

Teen needs assessment survey asked:

- What do you typically do after school?
- Why do you do this?
- What could the library offer you and your friends to make it a place you would want to come to more often?
- Are there things at the library that you don't like?
- Do you use the computers at the library? Who do you ask for help with computers?
- Where do you do homework?
- How could the library be a place for volunteering/doing good things for the community?
- What skills would teens learn from those experiences?

Case Study #2:
Teen Needs Assessment

Key results:

- 95 percent need transportation to get to the library
- 85 percent said they want to use computers at the library or need help using computers
- 85 percent want snacks to be available at the library
- Most need the library to be open later since they work or play sports after school, and need a place to do homework later in the evening
- 97 percent wanted better reading materials and computer gaming programs
- Most said they would come more often if it was a place they could be with their friends
- 98 percent want to help others at the library by being a tutor or other volunteer

Case Study #2:
Teen Needs Assessment

How the results were used:

- Created a teen space in the new library facility, and developed collections and programming that are relevant to teens
    - Added four new teen magazine titles and a once a month teen program that incorporates food, which has been well attended
- Added 11 new PAC terminals to the seven original ones, which led to an increase in teen library use

Case Study #3: Technology Needs Assessment

– Aztec Public Library's original technology program was supported by E-rate, Aztec Consortium, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

– After initial investment in technology was made, Aztec Library did needs assessments through community meetings and surveys to see what the community needed

Case Study #3: Technology Needs Assessment

We found what the community needed and built technology programs to meet those needs:

- Computer classes for general public and special populations such as elderly, and teens
- Human resources connected to public access computers in the library = *trainers*
- General need for more free access computers
- Technology for public agency partners to use at the library, for example: job skills trainings, assistive technologies for people with disabilities
- Business incubation resources for private business development

Case Study #3: Technology Needs Assessment

Results spurred partnerships with:

- Local partners
  - Aztec Schools, Vista Nueva Alternative High
  - San Juan College
  - Local businesses and community organizations
- State partners
  - UNM Digital Pueblo/Media Arts Lab
  - University of New Mexico's digital arts lab
  - Lodestar Astronomy Center
- Federal Partners
  - New Mexico congressional delegation
  - National Park Service

Case Study #3: Technology Needs Assessment

Lasting benefits of programs built from the needs assessments:

- Aztec Library technology program will become a driver of economic development and tourism and can help support and promote the library further

- The small technology program blossomed into a comprehensive technology program with partnerships that are significantly helping to sustain the whole library

Main Lessons Learned
for Take Away

– Networking is essential. Get involved in your community and learn about their needs. Include a broad spectrum of people – not just current users.

– If you are providing what your community needs, your patrons can become your best champions.

– Get started: If it is to be, it's up to me!
  - Process – Why
  - Examples and templates – How
  - Resources – Help