

Chat Contributions from CSL In Session - Using Interviews to Assess the Information Needs of Your Community

with Linda Hofschire, Colorado State Library, March 7, 2012

Experience with needs assessment – opening conversation

- We did a survey in 2010 that was community-wide to set a baseline, but questions weren't as precise as they might have been
- Medical Library serving about 400 employees, 500 medical staff, and whatever students, patients/families, and public who wander in, plus 100-some CDPHE employees as part of a special project. Historically I've done a general survey with low return about every 3 years in which I ask people to compare the importance and current quality of actual and potential resources and services.
- We did a survey of our users (random sample) in the fall.
- I am currently enrolled in a Community Needs Analysis class and using the Grover et al textbook.
- State Library serving the state. We have not done a needs assessment of our library, but we are constantly encouraging our public libraries to do so.
- I did a needs assessment for collection development using GIS data and system reports
- When I was at another library, I was involved quite a bit with conducting assessments for our strategic plan. Now, I'm a grad student planning to do research on public libraries and am looking to learn more about things like this to help with eventual research.
- We survey patrons every 18 mths and track stats every month. We serve ~7,000 patrons statewide. State Publications is also part of the state library and we don't have much on an assessment except meeting with gov docs librarians each month.
- Have not done a needs assessment but interested in learning for two reasons: identify off-campus community & for the purpose of renovation
- We conduct annual surveys of customers, web site users, and are currently in the process of conducting a community assessment in conjunction with an overhaul of our Strategic plan.
- We serve 146,000 and have conducted a variety of surveys.
- We are just getting started talking about doing some kind of community analysis.
- With our neighboring library sent out a survey to every postal address in the County. Still working on data analysis.
- We did a needs assessment a few years ago and we used a community focus group approach. A director from a neighboring library was the host of the meetings; it was an interesting exercise and we learned that our

community wants and needs places where they can come together as a community; that a sense of community was something people wanted and felt was lacking;

Why do a needs assessment?

- I'm interested in how to collect from non-users to determine why they are non-users and what they need
- Be sure you are doing your job
- to deliver what patrons need
- One question we had was what is the best way to get in contact with our users. Answer was e-mail.
- It was part of our process for coming up with our 5 year plan, which also informs budget allocations, etc.
- We are always interested in what our customers want, what they are looking for us to provide, and help us chart new directions.
- Where to I put my time and cash in order to have top quality for what's important to my patrons.
- connecting with the community overall and finding out what will get people in the door that we don't already do
- make sure we stay relevant
- establish baseline, show improvements, identify needs, create/strengthen awareness, identify trends.....
- love connecting with the community- nice way to put it
- Our needs analysis helps define our strategic goals and to prioritize services.

What method of needs assessment did you use, and why?

- We used focus groups, but we also do quarterly surveys of patrons which helps us gather information for our budget process
- community mail in survey and also used Civic Technologies to gather demographic data and overlay patron usage data.
- survey - so users could answer at a time convenient for them, easier to analyze data
- Used focus group for strategic planning
- surveys, primarily
- we used a survey
- pre & post tests to assess a service and its impact

- Besides the triennial journal survey I mentioned early, I also track usage of my resources, which guides my renewals.
- We utilize all the methods you've mentioned: paper surveys, online surveys, phone surveys, 'conversations' with our Director; focus groups, census data, public school data, etc. We use all these different methods in order to reach as many people as possible.
- Surveys, ILS reports (circulation, visits, etc.), focus groups. When we did the focus group, we could isolate a specific audience, i.e. teens.
- I did one time try to link into local principals and DRA test scores of the students served by our service. Difficult!
- Product demos
- I always encourage comments in my surveys - the numbers are the bones, the comments are the meat.
- This is interesting, because we are seeing great change in how our library is being used and I think interviewing some of our patrons might really help us see what it is they really need from the library...not always just books to check out anymore.
- I think your earlier slide with "Me, me, me, etc." says it all. We've found that customer needs and wants are very personal and in a nutshell they want more of everything and they want it all.
- "Who else should we talk to?" -- great question
- As part of our community assessment, we ask our branch managers to answer a series of questions, many involving observation and familiarity that center around the communities they serve: are there barriers out there to service, what's being built on that vacant lot, is that new road construction bringing new customers or rerouting current ones, etc.
- it really helps to look first at the overall big picture and then seeing how individual needs fit in to find the gaps
- We've also found that people in our community forget that they can go to the library for information needs.
- I think that as one thing we hoped to accomplish with our interviews - remind them that we were there

What ideas do you have for doing a needs assessment of your library?

- Use another idea I've been thinking about - sitting at each nursing unit for an hour or two - as an opportunity to catch interviewees.
- We are going to have to do journal cancellations and we want to get input from our users
- just wondering if any libraries have tried this online/webinar approach with communities to gather information. Might be worth exploring as alternative to group discussions/meetings.
- We have a lot of staff that are involved in the community - Chamber, Optimists, etc., looking to use those connections to reach key stakeholders in the community

- One of our driving questions in our assessment and strategic planning is what we call 'toward vital'. No matter how much good data we have or how good a case we seem to make, when it comes to budget time, the library is just not viewed by County decision makers as vital...we are discretionary. Our charge in our current efforts is to become a vital part of the fabric of Fairfax County.
- we have a specific portion of the community that we are looking to reach out to as well - 20-30 year olds - and trying to find out where they "are" in the community and how we can be a part of their lives
- Have gained some experience using GoogleDocs Forms to easily get surveys to people without paying for SurveyMonkey.
- We use SurveyMonkey's free service--up to 10 questions---and that has worked well for us so far
- Love the webinar idea!
- That's one of things we're trying to answer as well as resources to focus on, training for staff, etc.
- That's correct, we have a Board of Supervisors. They all profess to love us, tell their constituents they recognize how important we are, but when push comes to shove we're just not viewed as that important a service.
- It's hard as a county agency to be compared with Emergency Services, Police Force, etc...we have similar circumstances in Fauquier County
- We have a staff "community reference" blog where our staff who are active in community groups routinely record issues and concerns they've learned about in the course of the groups' meetings & activities
- I can say that they seem to have realized that the cost we've sustained over the past two budget cycles have been extremely deep and our customers have become more vocal in their support for the library.

What obstacles stand in your way of doing a needs assessment?

- time, time, time
- we have a population that changes drastically based on what time of the year it is...
- Worried about how to make sense/find themes with information we would get from interviews
- setting up meeting times with our users - they are all so busy
- As a rural community we have no media outlets other than a weekly newspaper and our website/FB page--it's hard to get information out to people en masse
- resources to do interviews - time, "bodies", etc.