SHOW NOTES

Assessment, Your Library, and Your Collections

We are joined by Jill Hurst-Wahl in this episode. She is an associate professor of practice in Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies and the president of Hurst Associates, Ltd.

Her presentation has two significant parts: general assessment and the gathering of collection-specific data. General assessment is in the same vein as EBLIP and data-driven librarianship – using data to make decisions as effectively as possible. The second part is simply taking this principle and applying it to the collection of materials that your library provides to patrons.

Assessment means work, which may turn some people off. However, it also implies improvement. Assessment can align services with your goals and mission statement, provide data to support desired changes, and prove to stakeholders that they’re valuable.

Keeping track of data and assessing progress allows libraries to monitor their goals and track the outcomes of decisions and their effect on the organizations. Assessment can reach into library services and determine how effective they are across the demographics in the population they serve. Not everyone uses the library the same way. This is extremely evident in the library’s collection.
There are 3 types of assessment:

- Diagnostic – Understanding your current state
- Formative – Assessing your situation as you’re moving forward, seeing how things are going
- Summative – Determining what happened at the end of a project or event

There are 3 different areas where assessment can significantly affect operations:

- Community – Communities are always being served by a library. These can be academic, correctional, public, or corporate communities. These are made up of different people with vastly different backgrounds, interests, and capabilities. Assessing the demographics your institution is serving helps you serve them better by making you aware of their needs.
- Services – Identify the services you offer. What’s being used? How are patrons interacting with the library, what do they find useful, what’s frustrating, what more would they like?
- Collections – Consider your collection. Is the collection meeting the needs of the community? What do people want to read, and what does the library provide? If an area isn’t getting enough traffic to warrant the resources, consider reallocating those resources somewhere that is more appreciated.

When you begin to collect data, there are some important principles to remember. If you’re administering surveys, make things simple and logical. Questions need to be easy to understand. Give your procedure a test run before you actually use it to minimize any confusion you may not have recognized. Reference all your assistants, whether they filled out the surveys or helped you parse the data. All information is valuable, so don’t discount anything. Similarly, don’t make claims the data can’t support. If you need to, either change your claim, or do more research. Don’t try to force data to fit a decision you’ve already made.

There are some risks. You may be wasting time by collecting data that you aren’t using. Collected data may not actually be relevant to the decisions you’re trying to make. If too many resources have gone into the collection, it may leave insufficient time or assets for implementation.

You need to make sure that your data clearly guides your actions. Data needs to be easy to understand when you’re using it to promote a change. Communicate why the change you’re
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working towards is a good idea, and make the data something that management can grasp in a minute.