

How to Listen to Your Community

Part 1:

Using Surveys to Gather Data for Needs Assessment and Advocacy

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Agenda

- Introduction & orientation
- Figuring out what you need to know
- Designing survey questions
- Getting your survey into the field

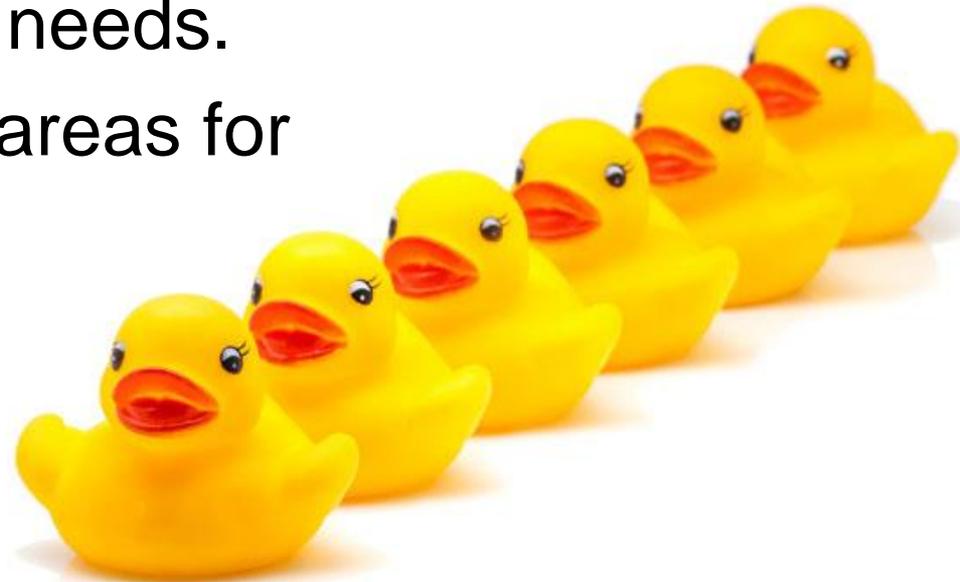
Data collection is kind of like a fishing expedition.



Except the goal should be to just get the fish you really need and don't get what you don't need caught in your net.

Why listen?

- Align library resources and services to community needs.
- Give voice to community members who you might not hear from at the library.
- Show your commitment to being responsive to emerging needs.
- Discover strengths and areas for improvement.



Another reason (if you need it)



- Edge has a whole strategic area that is mostly concerned with community assessment and evaluation (Benchmarks 4-6).
- Indicator 4.2 & 4.3 are almost entirely about needs assessment.
- Others can be more easily accomplished once you have needs assessment data in hand.

Librarians are researchers

Community needs assessments and evaluations are forms of research.

- You have questions that data can help answer:
 - Are we offering the right services?
 - Should we start this new initiative?
 - Did patrons achieve what we hoped they would?
 - Are patrons getting what they want?
 - Do we have sufficient support from community leaders?

Libraries gather data all the time

- Door counts
- Circulation statistics
- Program participation
- Satisfaction surveys
- Web analytics

But not often enough do they ask what questions these data answer. Many times they're collecting data that doesn't help answer anything useful at all.

Data are tools



What should data do?

- Help you make strategic decisions
 - Determine the possible outcomes
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies
 - Weigh different strategies against one another
 - Understand your constituencies
 - Clarify unexpected results
- Provide evidence of effectiveness
 - Assure programs have been implemented
 - Show the depth and reach of impact

What data can't do

- On its own, data can't
 - Make decisions
 - Give you the answers
 - Convince others about the value of libraries
- Only You + Data can do those things.
 - It is easier to use data as a tool if you start in the right place by spending most of your time understanding why you are collecting data and what you need to learn.

If your data aren't doing what you need them to, you might have chosen the wrong tool.



In general, public libraries need to choose a few good “multipurpose” tools rather than trying to have a lot of specialty tools.

Get ready to go!

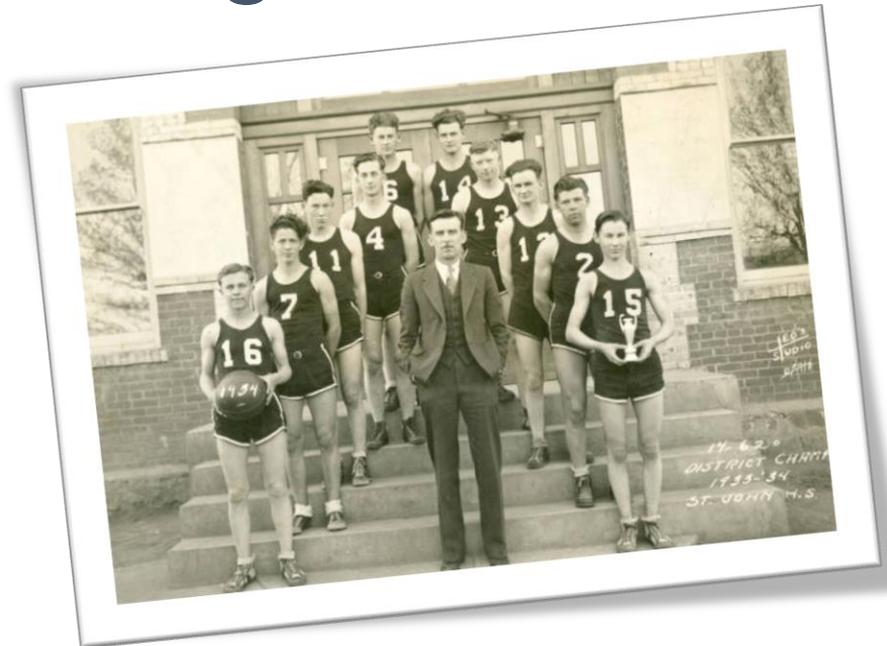
Planning your listening campaign is more important than anything else.

Basic steps a listening campaign

1. Assemble your working team
2. Gather existing data
3. Figure out what you need to know
4. Define data collection methods
5. Collect data
6. Analyze data
7. Reflection
8. Reporting

1. Assemble your working team

- ✓ Library managers
- ✓ Library board/friends
- ✓ Local government staff
- ✓ Peer agency staff
- ✓ Patrons



People who can help you:

- Understand the needs of your community
- Understand expectations in your political environment
- Connect with underserved communities
- Roll up their sleeves and do the work

2. Gather existing data

What existing data can tell you:

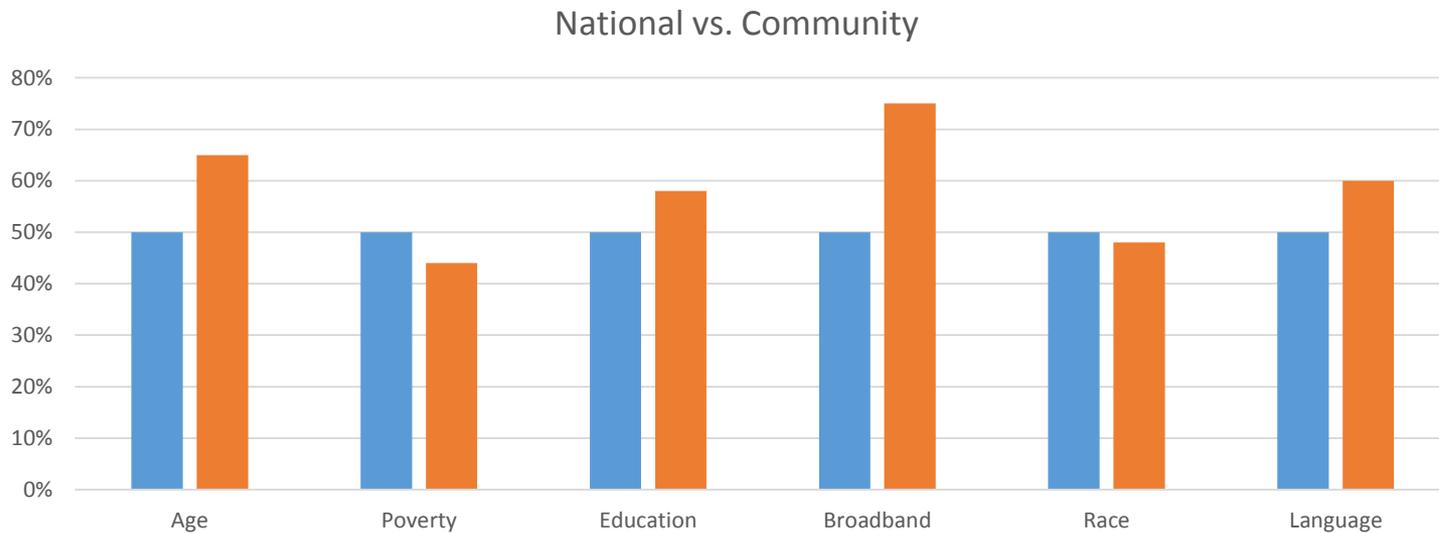
- Who lives in your service area
- What kinds of lives they lead
- What they might need
- How patrons are using the library

Data sources:

- Census/ACS
- Broadband USA
- Community indicators
- City/county surveys
- Education agency
- Employment agency
- Library records
- Media
- Public records
- Other research

Compile into a community profile

- What are the important demographics in your community that may drive library needs?



Compare to other research/surveys

My community is:

- Older than average
- More low-income
- More single-parent households

Research says:

- Older/low-income people are less likely to use technology or have technology at home.

Could mean: Higher use of library technology

More need for one-on-one help

More need for early literacy programs

3. Figure out what else you need to know

About your community:

- What are the most important issues facing your community?
- What do your community members need in order to be successful?
- What kind of community do you aspire to be?
- How is the library perceived by the community?

3. Figure out what else you need to know

About the library:

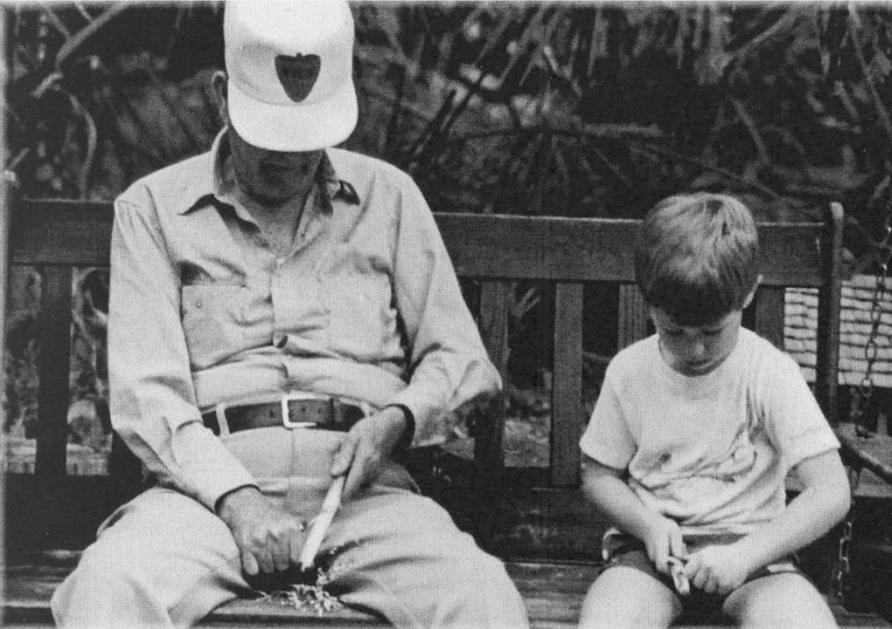
- How does the library support community goals?
- How does the library support patrons?
- How does the library support other organizations?
- What information would help you make decisions about programs to support community goals?

3. Figure out what else you need to know

About your patrons:

- Who are we serving? Where?
- What are their biggest needs? Why?
- Do our programs help them? How?
- Do they value the library in the ways we expect?

There may be a lot you think you need to know.

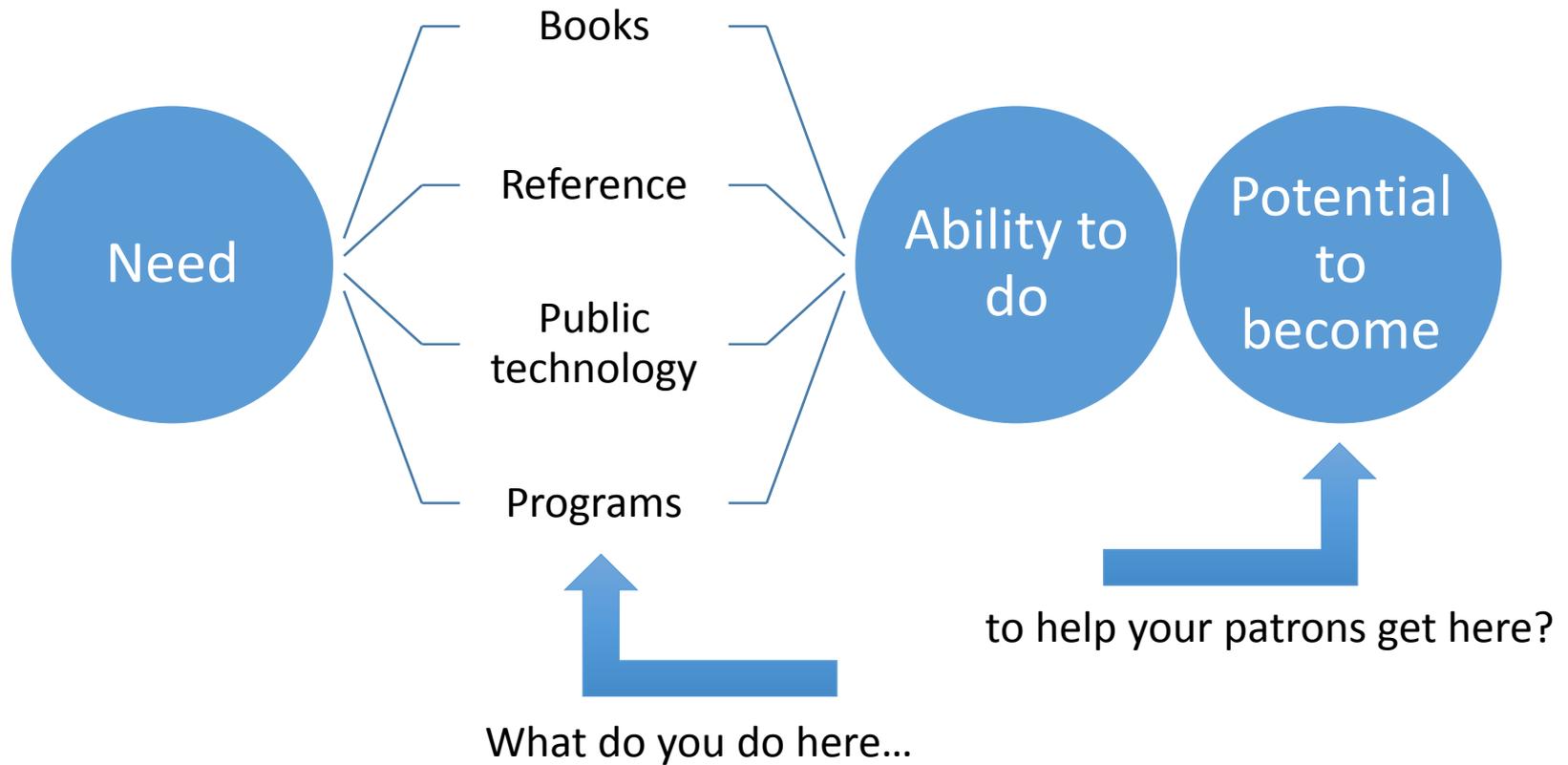


Try theory-of-change work to whittle it down.

Having, Knowing, Doing

- Frame together as a *speculative* theory of change around your questions (you'll do data collection to verify)
- The end point reflects the mission of your library, the priorities of the community, and the needs of patrons (through which community priorities are achieved).
- The library's services should reflect what you think your community needs to have, know, or do in order to meet those need.

Theory of change



And why do you think it helps?

Now you can test your theory

- Are the needs identified the most pressing in your community?
- Are there other needs and wants in your community that you aren't addressing?
- Do the resources and services you offer meet those needs and contribute to the change?
- Are there better ways to meet those needs?

An example of a first time theory of change

- The community's greatest need is employment opportunities.
- The library provides:
 - Books on resume writing, test preparation, and career choice
 - Public computers for writing resumes, looking for jobs, and applying for jobs online.
 - Programs on how to use social media for job seeking
- These services allow patrons to search and apply for jobs.
- Searching and applying for jobs is necessary to find employment
- Employed people are more self-sufficient

After spending a little more time

- The community's greatest need is ~~employment opportunities~~ economic self-sufficiency
- The library provides:
 - Books on resume writing, test preparation, and career choice
 - Public computers for writing resumes, looking for jobs, and applying for jobs online.
 - Programs on how to use social media for job seeking
- Searching and applying for jobs is necessary to find employment.
- Library services allow patrons to search and apply for jobs more efficiently.
- People who are more efficient in looking for work are more successful finding it.
- Employed people are more self-sufficient

Possible research questions

- Is economic self-sufficiency the community priority the library should focus on?
- Are the resources the library provides helping patrons be more efficient looking for work?
- Are library patrons successfully finding jobs?
- Do the jobs library patrons find help them achieve self-sufficiency?

Data collection methods

The voices approach

The goal is to hear from a variety of voices who can:

- Confirm/refute your theory of change
- Provide a more nuanced understanding of how your services affect change in your patrons and community
- Create a shared vision and solutions to community problems
- (and while you're there, get some good data for advocacy)

Methods

- Observation
- Logs (door counters, web analytics, etc.)
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Community forums
- Surveys

Considerations

- Capacity (people & money)
- Availability of expertise
- Community/key stakeholder acceptability

Surveys

Surveys (aren't just for satisfaction)

Best for:

- Validating findings from qualitative data
- Understanding the *extent* of the phenomena
- Learning about outcomes
- Gathering demographic information about patrons
- Suggestions for improvement
- Satisfaction

Surveys

Pros:

- Low-cost on the front end for web survey
- Able to reach/hear from more people
- Can be “piggy-backed” on other community surveys

Cons:

- Phone surveys very expensive
- Good survey questions require some expertise
- Analysis can be difficult and time consuming

Sampling and generalizing

- Sampling is a group of methods for selecting a smaller number of participants from within a larger population so that their results can be generalized to the entire population.
- Different sampling strategies result in different levels of the probable accuracy of the generalized result.
- When you send out a survey to all your patrons, you are conducting a census which has different rules for understanding accuracy of results.
- For most public libraries, it is unlikely that you will be able to sample respondents, or collect enough responses to a census to be able to claim generalizability with any calculable degree of accuracy.
- **Bottom line-you need to have a really good reason to conduct a sample, and spend the money.**

Sampling

- When should a sample be used?
- When the population you need to hear from is very large
- When the methods you are using are very labor intensive
- When the population doesn't have a lot of variation on key variables
- What is the right sample size/response rate for a generalizable survey? It depends...
- The size of the population
- How heterogeneous the population is on key variables
- The size of the smallest subset of the population you want to generalize to
- The expected response rate
- How much error can be tolerated

Concentrate on triangulating, not generalizing

- Using mixed methods is a more cost-effective way of validating your survey data.
- Surveys can be used in conjunction with interviews and focus groups.
- You can also use the data from your community profile!

What makes a good survey question?

- Provides information critical to what you need to know
 - Is specific/not vague
 - Is not biased or trying to “prove” something
 - Not leading
- Answerable
 - Asks about firsthand experiences
 - Not hypothetical
 - Asks only one question at a time
 - Doesn't make unwarranted assumptions
- Consistent
 - Every respondent interprets the question in the same way
- Natural and familiar language

Types of questions

- Dichotomous (yes/no)
- Multiple Choice (one answer or multiple answers)
 - Mutually exclusive, exhaustive choices (categories)
- Rank order scale – Forced preference
- Rating scales (a lot, some, a little, not at all)
 - Equal “space” between options
 - Specific – not open to interpretation
- Open-ended

- Get complete data -- Provide an answer option for everyone
 - Other (please specify)
 - Don't know
 - Don't want to answer
 - N/A (not applicable)

Survey questions

Get the most you can out of the fewest number of questions:

- Instead of “Have you visited the library in the past year?” Ask “How frequently have you visited the library in the past year?”
- Ask multi-check questions (top priorities)
- Use other organizations’ survey questions that have already been tested

Examples of survey questions

Needs improvement

- How would you rate your computer skills? Beginner, intermediate, or advanced
- How often do you use the Internet? Very often, fairly often, occasionally, rarely, or never
- How would you rate this computer class? Excellent, good, average, poor

Better

- Are you able to send an email without assistance?
- In the past month, about how many days did you use the Internet?
- I will be able to use the skills I learned in this class.
Completely agree, generally agree, generally disagree, completely disagree

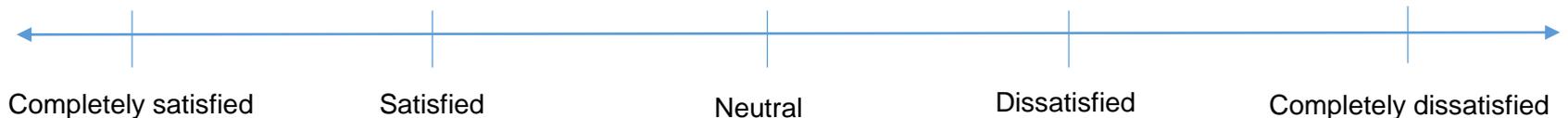
Likert scales

- When to use a Likert scale? Only when there are no “right” answers or objective standards
 - Subjective states (feelings and perceptions)
 - Agreement or support
- How many levels should be used in a scale?
 - 5 to 7 maximum for meaningful rating
 - 3 to 4 to ease response burden
- Should I provide a “neutral” option?
 - Better to provide a “Don’t know” or “Don’t want to answer” option off the scale than place “neutral” in the middle of a Likert scale.
 - If you have a middle option, it should genuinely be in the middle, i.e. mixed or equal (not neither); this marks the answer as ambivalence rather than uninformed.

How to present a Likert question

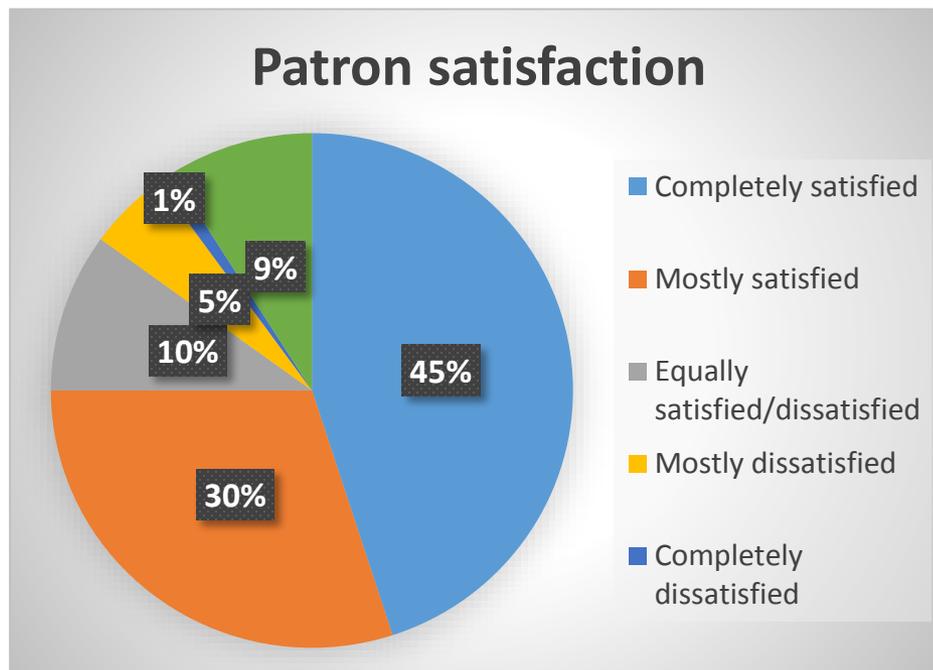
- How satisfied are you with the library's technology services?
 - Completely satisfied
 - Mostly satisfied
 - Equally satisfied and dissatisfied
 - Mostly dissatisfied
 - Completely dissatisfied
 - Don't know/don't want to answer

Not



How to present a Likert result

Do: 75% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the library's technology services.



Not: The average satisfaction was 4.3

Why? Neither numbers nor fractions of numbers were satisfaction category choices for the respondent.

Structuring your survey

- Friendly, respectful tone throughout
- Introduction: purpose & uses of survey
- Easy & interesting opening questions
- Question flow & clustering
- Save sensitive questions for the end
- You've asked them what you want to know..
Let them tell you what they want you to hear.
Provide a comments box at the end.

Survey pretesting

- Programmatic review: Are the questions important?
 - Do we really need to ask these questions?
 - Will knowing the answers change anything?
 - Will asking these questions hurt anyone?
- Are the questions consistently understood by respondents?
 - Test assumptions, language, and vocabulary
 - Cognitive interviews test understanding of questions
- Field test: Are respondents willing and able to answer the questions?
 - Use actual survey instrument and protocol
 - Debrief: was it too long, unclear, were questions skipped?

You have to work for responses

- Try a combo of web and paper survey
- Send out links to email list
- Mail paper survey with return envelope
 - Include link to web survey
- Make community aware of survey
 - Newspaper/radio announcement
 - Social media
 - Enlist partner organizations

A tool to help

<http://impactsurvey.org/>

What is the Impact Survey?

A survey tool that helps libraries:

- **Gather information** about how patrons use their technology services
- Analyze collected data to **inform internal planning** and benchmarking
- **Present findings** to key stakeholders to advocate for technology services

Why use Impact Survey?

- **No need to develop survey questions on your own.** Impact Survey was developed by library researchers and has been repeatedly validated.
- **No need to program or pay for Survey Monkey.** Impact Survey is ready for your use as soon as you sign up.
- **No staff time spent on analyzing results and formatting them into reports.** Impact Survey provides all of your results in easy to read reports that can be immediately put to use internally and externally.

The survey asks about use and activities in core outcome areas



Civic engagement



eGovernment



eBusiness



Employment



eCommerce



Health & wellness



Education



Social inclusion

Simple setup to professional-looking reports in just a few steps

LIBRARY LOGIN

Username or e-mail *

Password *

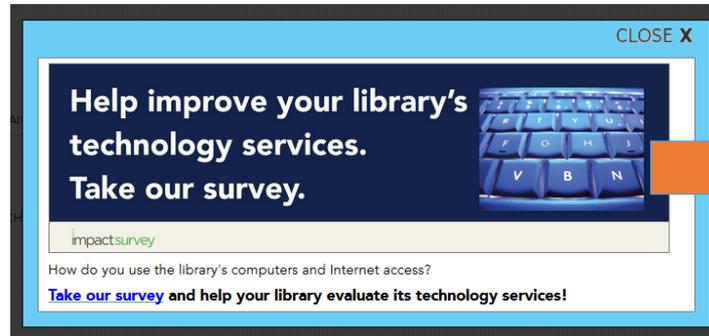
Forgot your password?

LOG IN

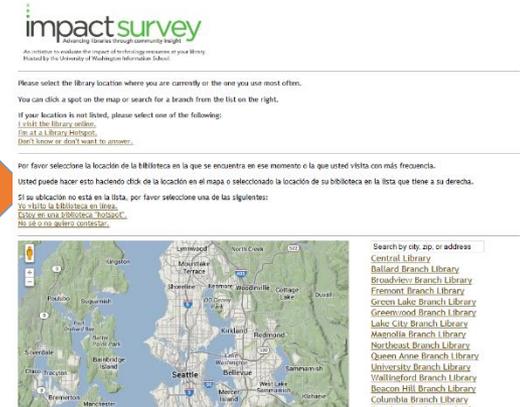
No Account?

REGISTER TODAY!

1. Create an account



2. Install the survey link on your website



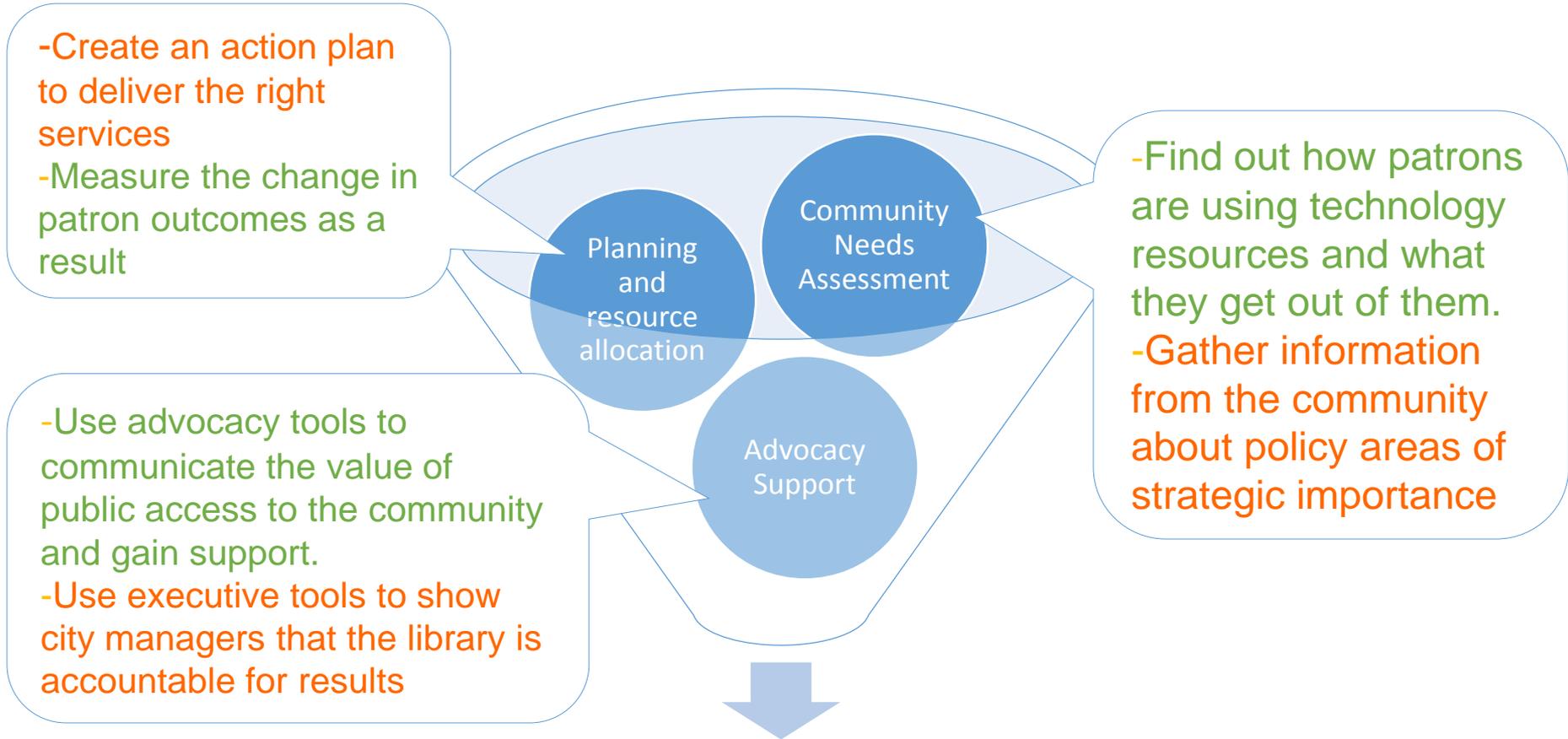
3. Run the survey and invite the community to respond



4. Get results in customized reports the next day

ImpactSurvey.org

How do Impact Survey and Edge work together?



Advancing communities through high quality and sustainable digital inclusion resources

Questions?

Listening to your community part 2

Wednesday, February 25

2:00 p.m. Central

- Interviews and focus groups
- Data analysis and triangulation
- Putting results to work

Thank you!

More information:



impact.ischool.uw.edu



impactsurvey.org



libraryedge.org

ImpactSurvey.org