The phrase needs assessment often causes anxiety among librarians in small settings. You think of large surveys and difficult interpretations with no definite conclusions. A needs assessment is a way to prove that a gap in services exists at your library, whether you know it already or not. Some needs assessments are quick and easy to conduct, while others may take considerable time. Following every step outlined here could be a yearlong project, but the extra time is worth it in the long run because a carefully done needs assessment will yield results that apply for more than a year. Reading this chapter will also let you know what you are not going to get if you want to do a quick needs assessment.

Why do a needs assessment at all?

- As a management tool, the results can be used to advocate for more funding or to write a grant.
- Budgeting and planning can benefit from knowing what users need.
- The results can be used to explain services to users or to communicate with those with budget or funding authority.
- A needs assessment is the foundation for evaluating the program of the library as a whole.
- A needs assessment may be recommended or required by an accrediting body or library association standards.

While Chapter 7 covers library standards in detail, needs assessments are usually part of a library standards document. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) 2004 standards include the statement “Comprehensive assessment requires the involvement of all categories of library users and also a sampling of non-users” (ACRL College and Research Libraries Task Force, 2004). For hospital libraries, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) standards recommend that need assessments be done regularly (JCAHO, 2006). Standard IM.1 requires planning to meet both internal and external information needs. The MLA Standards for Hospital Libraries 2002 have designated a standard for needs assessment as well, Standard 6, as shown in Figure 4.1 (Gluck, et al., 2002; Hassig, et al., 2005).
Figure 4.1 Standard 6: From the MLA Standards for Hospital Libraries 2002

“The librarian provides evidence of an ongoing assessment of the knowledge-based information (KBI) needs of the organization and the development and implementation of a plan to provide appropriate resources, services, and technology to meet those identified needs.

Intent: The librarian uses a variety of tools and techniques, both formal and informal, to assess the KBI needs of the hospital and medical staff. The needs assessment should address the timeliness of information services and document delivery. In response, resources and services are made available to meet those identified needs. Techniques may include, but are not limited to: focus groups, surveys, analysis of usage patterns, budget and strategic planning, inventory of collections, and one-on-one conversations with health care leaders regarding clinical and organizational information needs. Tools to be used include recognized guidelines, standards, lists of recommended resources, and benchmarking resources appropriate to the size and scope of the organization. Examples include MLA's benchmarking survey, the “Brandon/Hill Selected List of Print Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library,” and other recognized resource guides for health sciences specialties” (Gluck, et al., 2002: 470).

Attention to customer needs is important in any service profession. As covered in Chapters 2 and 5, the culture of assessment and the philosophies of total quality management (TQM) promote the change in library management to a customer-focused operation. To be customer focused, carrying out a periodic customer needs assessment is an essential part of the program of assessment and planning. Having a strategic plan with a mission statement has been mentioned. As part of the planning process, use of the Logic Model, as explained in Chapter 8, will integrate evaluation with the planning process including needs assessment. The ideas of strategic planning are briefly covered in Chapter 9.

Any good administrative report would indicate how you are meeting your customers’ needs. But where do you find the time to learn about the process of assessing those needs? You would perhaps start with a survey of the literature only to find few examples of needs assessment in smaller libraries available. Lynn Westbrook's Identifying and Analyzing User Needs gives an in-depth overview of the needs assessment process and is geared to larger libraries (Westbrook, 2001). The article by Annabeth Crabtree, which is presented as a case study from the literature at the end of the chapter, is one of the few we found (Crabtree and Crawford, 1997). An in-press article describes an assessment process at Via Christi Health System in Wichita, Kansas (Perley et al., 2007). The project was funded in part by a grant from the
National Network of Libraries of Medicine. The study was conducted on behalf of the Via Christi libraries for the purpose of developing an evidence-based, user-centered long-term plan. A consultant was hired to plan and analyze the study and prepare the final report of the study.

Recommendations were organized to address the primary questions:

- How can the Via Christi librarians best serve their patrons, given realistic limitations on time, resources, and personnel?
- Given these limitations, how can they best assist the medical center in terms of improving patient care and outcomes?

Most books on the subject are focused on either human resources training needs, educational needs, or larger sociological needs. It would take time to translate these procedures to a library setting or to translate the recommendations or examples to fit your setting. This chapter was developed with the practicing librarian in mind. The needs assessment process is simplified into twelve steps. It can be done quickly in as little as four weeks, or it can be a fully funded year long program using outside help. The scope of the assessment and the amount of resources available will determine the time you can spend on your project.

**WHAT IS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?**

In the social sciences, a needs assessment is a study that answers questions about the social conditions a program is intended to address and the need for the program. In libraries, a needs assessment studies the nature of the information need that a specific information service is intended to address and the need for that service or another service to meet the perceived need. Needs assessments have been described using three models (McKillip, 2003):

- gap in services
- marketing
- decision-making

The gap in services model measures ideal services against what is being offered, or against user evaluation of what the user perceives as being offered. The marketing model looks at the match...
between what users want and what the library can provide instead of the ideal situation. In the decision-making model, you take the survey results and weigh them using a scale to make decisions about the program being evaluated. In Step 10 below, scales are described where to reach a decision you compare the results, which can easily be implemented to the results, which will have the most impact. All of these models have pieces that can be used by libraries. The gap model is the most widely used.

Using the gap model, needs assessment theorists in the social sciences define a need as a gap between a real condition that can possibly be changed and an ideal condition that is acknowledged as valuable (Reviere, et al., 1996). In the library world, an ideal condition might be that every user can access the library's electronic journal collection. You perceive, through your needs assessment that the real situation might be that only one-half of potential users have access to a computer that has Adobe Acrobat Reader on it, which means that up to one-half of them are unable to download and read full-text articles. The gap here is technological. Can the situation be changed to close the gap? Or you might find out that the interface to the electronic journals is not easily accessible or understood. The gap here is both a technological one and an educational one. Can either gap be closed?

A broader observation might be that you perceive there is a gap between the real condition that few allied health staff members use library services, the ideal condition being that a good percentage of allied health staff use the library. What is the "gap" that prevents them from using library services? If you do not know what it is, you need to ask them by doing a needs assessment. In the real life evaluation example from the literature described below, the author does just that.

To find out if your professional assessment of the gap between the ideal situation and the real situation is more than an assumption, you perform a needs assessment. The final list of needs is prioritized and a plan drawn up to attempt to change systems and services to close the gap. The literature is adamant that this is not the end of the process. The final step is to redo the assessment to see if the changes in the program have modified the gap.

Be committed to the idea that if you identify a client need, you will be prepared to act. There is no point in doing an assessment and then filing it away with no plans for a change. For many reasons, this actually happens. Sometimes there is political pressure not to change. Sometimes the team loses its momentum and does not have the energy to finish. Make sure it is understood by all stakeholders involved that doing the needs assessment will most likely result in changes.
If you undertake a needs assessment, your users will assume that if an unmet need is identified, library services and systems will be changed to meet that need. Asking the library users questions about services raises their expectations of these services, and if nothing happens, the library system would be seen as nonresponsive. Is your library system or your organization open to change?

One of the guiding rules of needs assessment is that it should be “in context.” The context is your library and your customers. This need for context means that there is no cookie-cutter technique that will fit all libraries. Reading the literature can give you some ideas about the issues and problems, but you will not be able to replicate exactly what was done in their project. It is still worth reading some of the few examples that discuss their specific project. Whether a large academic library survey that uses major resources and data-gathering assistance, such as the University of Iowa Libraries’s undergraduate user needs assessment, or an example from a smaller library, such as reported by Crabtree and by Perley, you will be able to get few ideas from their experience (Crabtree and Crawford, 1997; Perley, et al., 2007; Clougherty, Forys, and Lyles, 1998).

There are various levels of needs assessment in every situation. There are macro-assessments of the whole library service and micro-assessments of one service or new program. Something as simple as a free trial on an expensive online resource that was broadcast on a company wide e-mail list to solicit opinion could be considered a mini-needs assessment and could be reported as such.

THE 12 STEPS OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROJECT

A needs assessment project has three critical components:

- A strategy to identify what you need to know about your users’ information needs
- A set of methods to find out this information
- A way to integrate what you learned into your library planning and service provision

At the end of the chapter there is a step-by-step workbook that can save you time and effort and give you useful results. The pro-
cess outlined in the workbook can be applied to whatever type of needs assessment you do as well as whatever type of library you are in. How any needs assessment progresses will depend on the question being asked and the resources expended. You can use this workbook to do a quick or a comprehensive project. There is a copy on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 4 folder in word-processing format so you can fill it out as you do your planning.

PREPARE FOR THE PROJECT: STEPS 1–3

As you start your plan, you can use steps 1 through 3 to prepare. You could involve a few people but not a large, formal group at this time. In laying this groundwork, you can make preliminary decisions about cost, feasibility, and time frames involved.

STEP 1. DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE OR QUESTION

In the first step, you write down your purpose:

- What do you perceive the need to be?
- Why are you doing this needs assessment?
- Who is asking you to evaluate this need?
- How does the need fit with your mission or strategic plan?
- What resources will be needed to conduct the needs assessment?
- How important is the need?

Answers to these questions will drive the use of your time and resources. As the manager deciding to do the assessment, you would want to briefly answer these questions. They will form the basis of your decision to proceed with the project. Once this is done, you can begin gathering the team of advisers and coworkers to plan and carry out a detailed plan for a needs assessment.

What Do You Perceive the Need to Be?

Write a brief description for yourself of the problem you see in your system. You may have an idea of what is wrong, but you have a feeling it would be best to have your idea verified by your users or customer base. Can you articulate the problem? If not, how are you going to evaluate it? This does not have to be extensive, just a few ideas you can bring to a team you will be forming to do the project.
METHOD 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Why Are You Doing This Needs Assessment?
This is the first question to ask as you start your plan. From time to time new ideas and technologies come up that are interesting. But does your library system “need” them? Sometimes change happens so fast that the whole system needs to be evaluated. Is this assessment going to test whether your mission is being met in the light of the new technologies? Sometimes you are mandated from above to find out if your department is meeting the needs of its clients in a general way. Or perhaps your administration takes the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) standards seriously and requires evidence of a periodic needs assessment.

Who Is Asking You To Evaluate This Need?
Asking “why” will lead to the question: Who wants the assessment done? It might be you, the head librarian, asking if your customers need an expensive resource. It might be an outside agency or the upper administration. Just as in a reference interview, the purpose of the person asking the question greatly affects the answer. His or her exact request needs to be clarified.

How Does the Need Fit with Your Mission or Strategic Plan?
It is also important to ask if the proposed needs assessment fits with the library’s strategic plan. An ideal needs assessment is really just part of the larger planning and assessment process. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, plans involved in the culture of assessment come into play. Having a mission statement and plans to develop a strategic plan are critical to the process. Using tools such as the Logic Model described in Chapter 8 and the SMART goals described in Chapter 12 is useful.

A needs assessment project is done within the context of the organization the library is part of. If you know your company cannot afford an expensive resource, there is no point in asking if people need it. The administration expects resources allotted to the library to be spent to provide specific services to meet the information needs of the organization. You have an overall plan in mind about how you are going to spend the budget allotted to the library, even if it is not written down. One could say, then, that a needs assessment is really just part of the budgeting process.

The most important part of a strategic plan is a definition of a vision and mission statement for the library. The mission drives the expenditure of funds and thereby the plan, even if the plan is not written down. If your library does not have a mission, get together with your staff and/or supervisor and write one. As you
start this process, you will find that you have always had a mission. You just never articulated it or wrote it down. Can you describe in 30 seconds what your library does? That would be your mission. Study your company's mission and strategic plan and see where you can provide services to meet it. Model your plan on theirs. It should be brief and discussed by the whole library staff. A needs assessment project can help you reassess your mission statement and strategic plan. It can guide plans for capital investment, discover technologically driven shifts, and identify trends, emerging environmental concerns, and unexpected opportunities, all of which will affect the direction you and your library should take.

What Resources Will Be Needed to Conduct the Needs Assessment?

What information, and how much, will be required to assess and analyze the need? This question will affect how many resources you put into your assessment. Sending out an e-mail to get opinions on an expensive resource uses far fewer resources than a pre-tested print survey that goes out to 700 people. But there are problems with Web surveys, too. Each has its place. Refer to Chapter 10 on data collection for more on deciding which method best fits your needs assessment.

How Important Is the Need?

Finally, how much importance will be attached to the results of the assessment? How important is it that we do or do not buy the resource? If you have the budget, the results of your e-mail survey are important in the decision as to whether to purchase the resource. If you do not have the money and if the results are positive for buying the resource, the results will need to be presented to ask for a budget variance to buy the resource. This gives added importance to the assessment.

STEP 2. GATHER YOUR TEAM

It is best not to do a needs assessment alone. Professionals in many settings know a lot about their customers' needs and work hard to meet them. But they also can make assumptions that are not totally on target. It is best to involve a steering committee in the needs assessment project.

The steering committee would consist of library staff members and staff members from around the institution who have an interest or stake in the project you are undertaking. For example, if your project involved some educational component, you would
want to include any other employees who have a role in education in your institution. If your project involved physicians, you would want to have some physicians on your steering committee. If you were planning a community outreach program, you would want to have members of the community involved. If appropriate, you could involve librarians from a nearby institution as advisers.

If you are in a one-person setting, ask interested coworkers or neighboring librarians to help out. Think of your extended network. This could include library school professors and students, consultants from your state library, or librarians from other types of libraries. You could have steering committee members who are consulted only by e-mail. As a library professional, you probably already have a pretty good idea of what you are going to look into. You could write up some preliminary plans and present them to your new steering committee as ideas, getting input from that point as to how to accomplish this project. You prepared for the first meeting in Step 1, but you need to be open to revision of your ideas once the team meets. At your first meeting you can discuss your ideas, the potential timeline, and an idea of the resources available for the project. Chapter 11 has some communication tips on working with teams such as the steering committee.

STEP 3. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS AND INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The library does not exist in a vacuum. Depending on what you are planning to measure, you should be able to identify parties who will be affected. If you are planning an assessment of a new program or technology, there will be people in the institution who have some involvement in it even before you start. If you were planning a systemwide needs assessment where the entire hospital is involved, your stakeholders would be interdisciplinary. Stakeholders have a vested interest in your plans and should help with the planning of the design. Stakeholder involvement in the planning phase will greatly facilitate their acceptance of changes that are made as a result.

Any needs assessment project requires the support of your management. Since being able and willing to change is a vital part of the needs assessment process, the support of management in that change is essential. After having done preliminary planning, as described in Step 1, it would be best to discuss the plans with your immediate supervisor. If it is a larger plan whereby you are planning to ask for more budget money, you could inform other management on a higher level that you are doing the assessment. They are, of course, very busy people, and your library is one of
many departments vying for their attention. It is best not to bring up the results for the first time during the budget preparation time, since this is one of the busiest times. If you have reported the results to them previously, they might have had time to review them.

It would also be good to identify with the steering committee what internal and external factors exist that could influence your plans. This is called an environmental scan, or SWOT analysis. Analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that surround the problem. Using this technique is described in Chapter 12, and there is an example on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 8 folder.

The external review can determine which departments could be affected by the project. Is your project technological, and does it require interaction with the information systems department of your institution? If your project might result in an expansion of services, it would be good to determine which departments could be affected. When we were doing a mini needs assessment to decide whether to purchase a portable computer classroom to be used for educational programming, we found that other departments had a use for such technology as well. There were also plans for audiovisual consolidation. If acted upon, these plans would have impacted our program. Internal factors might include your budget and staff. Is your budget going to cover the project, or will you need more funds? Your staff should be consulted on various plans so that they are not surprised. How will the outcome of this needs assessment impact their jobs? Discussing possible outcomes with your staff in advance might help minimize staff anxiety. Change can be a very stressful thing to library staff who may feel that their jobs could be replaced with new technologies. Also enlisting staff members to help out is a wise use of resources, since they often know the systems being assessed well and are stakeholders in the outcome of the assessment.

### PLAN THE PROJECT AND CONDUCT THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT: STEPS 4–8

Now that you have determined your purpose, identified stakeholders, scanned the environment, and gathered a steering committee, you and your steering committee can plan and carry out the project. This is no different from any project involving re-
sources, timelines, and committees. Steps 4–7 can actually be done by the steering committee simultaneously. Then you can progress to Step 8 and begin to gather data.

**STEP 4. DEFINE THE QUESTIONS**

With the preliminary planning done and the purpose of the needs assessment determined, you now want to see if what you are planning to measure can be measured. With your steering committee, you now develop the questions that you will ask to get at the opinions of or facts about your users. These are the research questions that will drive your assessment.

This research question definition will affect your decision on what method to use to gather data. The research question should not be as generic as: Do customers need educational programs? To be meaningful the question needs to be much more specific. A more measurable, and therefore more meaningful, question might be: What is the need for more instruction in using the online full-text journal collection? This assumes you know why you need to ask this question. Have there been complaints? Do people seem confused? Did the library staff observe patron frustration in finding materials? Which patrons seem to be having the most trouble? All these questions will influence how you structure your research question or questions.

One of the problems for needs assessment, or any kind of research, is determining what data you will need to answer your chosen question. Berkowitz has developed a master matrix for designing needs assessments (Berkowitz, 1996). She matches these four parts:

- each research question
- the data that will answer it
- the data source that will be needed
- an analysis plan for that data source
Figure 4.2 illustrates how such a matrix would look. Using the structure of a table will help you arrive at a research question that can actually be answered. It will also help you determine how the analysis can be done. The data analysis section of Chapter 10 can help you with this process. You will then be able to see how your data will appear in the end. While this exercise may seem to be a backward approach, it will help you avoid wasting time on a poorly formed question.

In this example, based on recent reports in the literature and in talking to your colleagues, you are interested in starting an education program. You feel your users are not making the most of
your e-journal collection, and you would like to shift some of your staff time to teach people how to access it more efficiently. But first you want to verify your opinion with a needs assessment. Figure 4.2 is a matrix for some possible research questions to measure this need and gap.

**STEP 5. DETERMINE RESOURCES AVAILABLE**

Resources are most often figured monetarily. How much employee time will be expected? Employee time costs money. Can you afford to hire an outside consultant? If you are planning to do a survey, how much money will it take to print and distribute a survey or to do an online survey with a commercial vendor? Each data-gathering method has some expenses. Focus groups require time to organize, meet, and report. Computerized surveys may require a subscription fee. If you have some idea about the resources available before you start, you will not waste committee time planning something you cannot afford. The steering committee can develop a formal budget or an informal spending plan for smaller projects. This would include internal staff time, consultants, printing, mailing, computer and/or software expenses, and possible incentives, such as drawings or gifts for participation. This budget plan would be drawn up and shared with all stakeholders. A section in Chapter 12 on budget planning has a list of activities to use for itemizing the budget. While most costs of evaluation are for staff time, there are other expenses. This extensive list can be edited. It is included on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 12 folder as a spreadsheet for easy development into a budget.

**STEP 6. DEVELOP A TIMELINE**

Timelines can be very short or very long. As the manager doing the preliminary planning for this project, you probably have some idea how long the project will take, or perhaps how long you want it to take. It is best to inform your steering committee members as you ask them to join the committee about how long you expect the project to take. This will aid in their personal planning and help you find members who are committed to seeing the project through to the end. If it is a long project, they need to know this so they can plan to dedicate more time to it. You can write up a preliminary timeline and present it to the steering committee for revision and comments. Since other employees are involved, this timeline should be very specific as to how many meetings are needed. This will help you avoid the tendency to hold too many unnecessary meetings or meetings that go longer than they should. The planned work that takes place between meetings by different members of the group could also be listed.
For more involved projects, develop a Gantt chart to plan your timeline. See an example of a Gantt chart in Step 6 in the Workbooks below and more in detail in Chapter 12.

**STEP 7. DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMERS**

Library customers are more than just the people who walk in the door. In today’s networked world, some of our customers may never even see the library. In a corporate setting, you could view every employee as a customer. In a hospital setting, this could be expanded to include patients and persons in the surrounding community who are seeking health information. Exhaustive lists of various groups of employees or the public usually do not help determine what services to offer and how to design services, however. Most services are defined by primary, or targeted, customers. These main customers would be mentioned in your library mission statement. *Target population* is a term used in market research and sociological research to describe a population you want to observe. This group is the total population from which information is needed, the population intended to be identified and served by the program. For example, in a medical library, one target population might be all active medical staff and another target might be all nurses. If you asked the same questions of these two groups, the answers would be different and not necessarily comparable.

One can define the library’s primary customers and then rank others as secondary customers. As more resources become available to the library, existing services can be extended to the secondary customers. Or, if the needs of the secondary customers are assessed or surveyed, resources can be requested specifically to meet their needs, thereby elevating them to primary customers. Figure 4.3 gives an example of defining your target population.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Figure 4.3 Choosing Your Target Population Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a needs assessment reported by Crabtree, the library had a defined set of services for its primary customers, physicians. It was observed by the library staff that another set of customers, allied health personnel, were not using the library services much. The needs assessment was done to see what barriers existed for this population that caused them not to use the library. After the results were analyzed, the library was able to modify its services. As an example of one result, 20% of the respondents felt the collection was deficient in their subject area. The library responded by modifying its collection development policy and purchasing more materials in this area (Crabtree and Crawford, 1997).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
METHOD 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Primary Research

Human Subjects

You work in a hospital or search setting, your union may have an Institutional Review Board, or you may have a formally designated to review and monitor biomedical research involving human subjects in accordance with regulations. An IRB has authority to approve, modify, or disapprove modifications in (to obtain approval), or disapprove research. This group review and monitor the rights protection of the rights and welfare of human research subjects. If you are planning a data-gathering project involving human subjects, they may not be considered “human subjects” and their privacy and confidentiality may need to be protected. It is best to check to see if a review is necessary so that it can be stopped by IRB actions in the middle of the project. Of course, you also need to know that you are directly protecting your subjects, and the IRB office can see you on this. Once your research plans (or research protocols, as they might call them) are decided upon, the plans can be presented to the IRB.

While a target population would be the population you want to observe, a survey population is the population you can observe. In most cases you cannot talk to every member of a target population, so you rely on a sample of the target population to assess needs. How to select a sample population is discussed in Chapter 10. Remember that if you choose to conduct a voluntary survey, it will be inherently biased because those who fill out the survey have selected themselves into it. You will be hearing from those who want to be heard and will miss those who refuse to be heard. This is called a self-selection bias.

The purpose and goals of the needs assessment project will indicate the population to be assessed. The steering committee should spend time discussing who these people are, why you want to know what they need, and how you define them.

STEP 8. GATHER DATA FROM IDENTIFIED SOURCES

Now that you have defined your question, gathered a steering committee, and made a plan, you are finally ready to gather data to assess the situation you are interested in. To most people, the term, needs assessment, means conducting a survey, but you can do a needs assessment without performing a survey. Data for needs assessment are generally divided into two types: primary and secondary.

Primary Data

- Primary data for the project are data gathered at the time of the project for the first time using: surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations.
- Secondary sources of data come from records or sources you already have, such as locally gathered statistics, national surveys, literature searches, previous needs assessments, or comments from a suggestion box.

Many of the books available on needs assessment have chapters on methodologies for gathering the different kinds of primary data such as surveys, focus groups, observation, interviews as well as questionnaire design. Chapter 10 of this book was developed to give the reader more detailed information on these topics. If you collect primary data by asking people questions, this is considered research with human subjects. You should check with your Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects to see if you need approval.
Secondary Sources

Secondary sources of data are everywhere once you start looking for them. Some places to look are:

- Previously gathered local statistics
- Previous needs assessments
- Participation in corporate quality committees and initiatives
- Library or technical standards
- Comments from a suggestion box or user comments
- Literature search for journal articles and a Web search
- National or local surveys such as the MLA Benchmarking Network surveys
- Participating in corporate committees, reading corporate communications, or consulting with persons in key positions and/or with specific knowledge

You should try to acquire secondary data first. Primary data are expensive and time consuming to collect. Sometimes your secondary data can identify a gap without your having to gather any primary data. On the other hand, primary data from a survey or other data-gathering plan may need to be supplemented by secondary data. Either way, it will take you less effort to collect secondary data, and then move on to primary data if necessary.

Previously Gathered Local Statistics

Are you gathering any statistics in your library already? If not, what statistics should you begin to gather? Association surveys such as the MLA Benchmarking Network survey, the AAHSL survey, or the ARL survey can be used as background for establishing the need to do a needs assessment by identifying gaps in your services by comparing your numbers or services with others.

The MLA Benchmarking Network survey, the work of a committee of hospital librarians in 2002 and 2004, has a worksheet for the measures that are traditionally asked about libraries in relation to inputs and outputs. It includes more than 45 questions about the service practices of nonacademic health sciences libraries so they could be compared using various evaluation techniques. Figure 4.4 gives examples of a few of the measures of library activities from the MLA Benchmarking Network survey.
This survey was conducted in 2004, however, and in today’s electronic world, it is difficult to pin down which statistics to collect about your electronic resources, because they shift constantly. As discussed in Chapter 3, the IMLS-funded E-Metrics Instructional System (EMIS) provides a Web-based course regarding the usage of and uses for networked information resources (EMIS, accessed: 2006). The EMIS program also has a downloadable Electronic Resources and Services Annual Report, which can be copied and adapted for your situation.

The issues involved in measurement of library activity are covered in Chapter 3. While they are controversial and in transition, if you have not been gathering any statistics, it might be a good time to start. Without any measures of activity, how are you going to answer questions from the administration? Part of the culture of assessment described in Chapter 2 is having a management information system. It can be a simple spreadsheet or database. The idea is to collect your data systematically. How measures are reported can differ greatly. For example, they may be reported monthly, quarterly, or annually. You can use a spreadsheet or database to collect different statistics and compare them more easily.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 4.4 Sample Measures Gathered for the MLA Benchmarking Network Survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediated Searches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient Care Mediated Searches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference Questions for Consumers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Program Sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Program Session Participants</td>
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<td>Monographs Circulated</td>
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<td>Items Received from Outside Sources (Borrows)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Items Sent to Outside Sources (Lends)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print Monographs</td>
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<td>Print Monographs Purchased</td>
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<td>Monographic Titles with Electronic Full-Text Access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Externally Produced Bibliographic Databases for End Users</td>
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</table>

Note: The complete 2002 and 2004 questionnaires, which cover many more statistics, can be found on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 6 folder, and the 2002 set is an electronic appendix to the article on the project (Dudden, et al., 2006).
by normalizing different units. Columns or rows can be arranged by month so data can be pulled out for annual reports by the calendar year or budget year. This should be kept up-to-date so they can be pulled out any time someone should ask you to provide them. Assuming you have already gathered measures, what do they show for the purposes of needs assessment? If compared over time they might show an increase or a decrease in activity. How does this change in activity relate to the information needs of the customer? These types of statistics might be a justification to do a needs assessment.

**Previous Needs Assessments**

When was your last needs assessment? Did you institute new services to fill the gap identified at that time? Did they fill the gap? Can you ask if the user still needs some of those items you could not accomplish before? As an example, in our case study from the literature, one of the needs identified at St. John’s Regional Health Center in Springfield, Missouri, was for a better library facility. That was in 1995. In 2005 perhaps the electronic revolution has negated that need. Instead of more space, maybe they need to redesign their space to accommodate more computers. Maybe they need to put funds into the Web site to provide better navigation. Maybe they need to investigate a proxy server for off-campus access. These questions came up by analyzing a previous needs assessment result and determining what had changed.

**Participation in Corporate Quality Committees and Initiatives**

Participation in corporate quality programs can generate data that might be useful and also give you experience in research. Chapter 5 covers the concepts of quality improvement (QI) and its use as an evaluation technique. Your library could do evaluations while participating in the hospitalwide quality improvement program. These might reveal a gap. Your quality improvement project can sometimes be restructured and reported as a needs assessment. Serving as a resource to the quality committee members can help raise the visibility of the library services.

**Library or Technical Standards**

Comparing your library operations and collections with published standards can be a form of needs assessment. Using standards for evaluation is covered in Chapter 7, with enumeration and details about the Medical Library Association’s *Standards for Hospital Libraries 2002, revised 2004* (Gluck, et al., 2002; Hassig, et al.,
In relation to a needs assessment, you could review appropriate standards and use the results to identify a gap in services or processes. Standards can be classified as technical or performance. Technical standards have to do with cataloging codes or interlibrary loan codes. Associations or government agencies often write performance standards to recommend best practices for a particular type of library.

The Medical Library Association has had a long history of writing both technical and performance standards. Its hospital library standards were first written in 1970, then rewritten in 1984, 1994, and 2002. The *Standards for Hospital Libraries 2002, revised in 2004* detail ten areas where a librarian could compare the library's operations or situation with what is considered a standard. Doing ongoing needs assessments is recommended in Standard 6. So if you are not doing needs assessments, the standard is pointing out a gap in your library service. Of course doing a needs assessment to see if you should be doing one is a little odd! However, if you found another gap and needed to convince someone that a needs assessment should be done, this standard would back you up.

Standard 7 states that “the library actively promotes KBI services and resources to all user groups and provides evidence thereof” (Gluck, et al., 2002: 468). There is a list of user groups and promotion activities. If there is a group you are not actively serving or a promotional activity you are not doing, this would identify a potential gap to be assessed. One promotional activity mentioned in the standard is “participation in new employee orientations.” Figure 4.5 demonstrates a mini needs assessment to see if there is a need for participation in new employee orientation, as mentioned in the standard.
Figure 4.5 Mini Needs Assessment on New Employee Orientations

A. Prepare for the Project.
Step 1. Define your purpose or question:
Is it important for the library to be mentioned in the new employee orientation?
Step 2. Identify stakeholders and internal and external factors:
   Human Resources Department which holds the new employee orientation; the new employees.
Step 3. Gather your team—Who is going to do what:
   Ask to meet with HR and involve some of your staff.

B. Plan the project and conduct the needs assessment.
Step 4. Define the goals and objectives:
   Goal is to let new employees know what the library does.
Step 5. Define resources available:
   The employee orientation program has very little time to give to each department. There is a booklet that library materials could be included in. There is a tour that could point out the library.
Step 6. Time line:
   The tour could be modified immediately. The booklet is reassembled in December and republished in January.
Step 7. Define your customers:
   The new employee; the HR staff that conducts the orientation.
Step 8. Gather data from identified sources:
   Ask via e-mail what several libraries are doing in your state or region.

C. Analyze the data and recommend a plan of action
Step 9. Analyze the data:
   Review what HR can provide; review what other libraries are doing.
Step 10. Make a decision and a plan of action:
   Plan to include a welcome letter from the library and a data form for circulation in the New Employee booklet. Have the tour stop by the library. Put it on the calendar to update the welcome letter every December if necessary.
Step 11. Evaluate the needs assessment process and report to administration:
   Report to your administrator the review and the actions taken.
Step 12. Repeat needs assessment in the future to see if the gap is smaller:
   Monitor how many circulation forms come in from the Orientation booklet.

Comments from a Suggestion Box or User Comments
What if you did an extensive needs survey and found out that a high percentage of the respondents found the library computer chairs to be uncomfortable. Did you really need to do an extensive survey to find this out? A suggestion box might be just as
good. Many libraries have comment forms where on the top the user makes a comment and on the bottom the library staff responds. This can easily be done on the Web. Do an Internet search on “library suggestion box” to see what creative methods other libraries are using. A periodic report compiling the suggestions by topic and the library’s responses can be summarized for the administration. This could be considered a type of assessment of user needs if you described it that way.

**Literature Search/Web Search**

If you were planning a needs assessment to target a specific group or service, it would be natural to survey the literature to see if there was something published on the topic. Finding relevant articles can guide your project and save you some time. Perhaps you have thought up a new service after having lunch with some nurse managers. It came out that they felt the staff nurses were not using the online resources enough. Before doing a full-blown assessment to prove that this was the case, you might find enough evidence in the literature that there is a need to educate nurses in online resources. If you did a PubMed search on “Education, Nursing AND Online Systems AND library,” you would find an article by Jody Wozar that discusses a program to teach nurses about the available resources (Wozar and Worona, 2003). The author has done a needs assessment and a postinstructional assessment. Using this article, you could meet with a nursing staff development coordinator to discuss ways to teach the nurses in your own institution. Again, you could verify the need and respond to it without performing a formal assessment. You could report to your supervisor your activity in this area in the form of a needs assessment.

**National or Local Surveys**

Reviewing a survey of library activity in general can give you ideas about what other services or programs you might consider offering. If your planned needs assessment has a comparable question on the survey, you can use that data as well as any original data you collect. For example, you might be performing a needs assessment on starting a program of library education, showing users how to use e-journals and how to search MEDLINE. You would want to do a survey to see what the need is in your institution. You can also look at the MLA Benchmarking survey to see what the common practice is nationwide. You can construct a chart from the MLA Benchmarking Network survey by copying the data from the Web or from the documents on the CD-ROM.
in the Chapter 6 folder. Figure 4.6 shows that if you are a hospital with 1,500 FTEs (full-time employees), you could expect to hold 11 sessions a year attended by 84 people or more, up to 12 people a session. This is based on a group of 37 to 40 hospital libraries of like size. The median number is used and not the mean, because the data is widely dispersed and the median is a more robust measure than the mean when the data has a wide range. If your planning for the program indicated that your hospital needs a computer lab with 12 computers, these figures could support that phase of the plan.

### Figure 4.6 Educational Programs in Hospitals with 1,500 Hospital FTEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range descriptions for hospital FTEs</th>
<th>Qualified answers</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Third quartile</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Educational Program Sessions by Number of Hospital FTEs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Educational Program Session Participants by Number of Hospital FTEs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Educational Program Session Participants per Session by Number of Hospital FTEs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you were to hold 11 or 12 sessions a year, what would the staffing needs be for such a program? You can construct another table using the MLA Benchmarking Network survey, as shown in Figure 4.7, based on the library FTE and see what the median numbers are. Note that the MLA charts can all be read the same way. This kind of data would supplement and enrich any other data that you might gather. It can also give you a jumping-off point and save you the effort of gathering basic information. You do not need to determine how many educational programs are appropriate for a library with 1.5 to 2.4 FTEs, for example, because the MLA Benchmarking survey gives you that number. Instead, you can go a step beyond and try to discover what resources you need to accomplish that level.
Figure 4.7 Educational Programs in Hospitals with 2.3 Library FTEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range descriptions for library FTEs</th>
<th>Number of Educational Program Sessions by Total Library FTE</th>
<th>Number of Educational Program Session Participants by Total Library FTE</th>
<th>Number of Educational Program Session Participants per Session by Total Library FTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>51 qualified answers</td>
<td>45 participants</td>
<td>43 participants per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>24 mean</td>
<td>145 participants</td>
<td>15 participants per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>12 median</td>
<td>100 participants</td>
<td>10 participants per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>22 third quartile</td>
<td>200 participants</td>
<td>19 participants per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>243 maximum</td>
<td>718 participants</td>
<td>55 participants per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 4: 1.5 to 2.4</td>
<td>1 minimum</td>
<td>10 maximum</td>
<td>1 minimum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other People as Sources

At managers meetings and other corporate committee meetings, keep your ears open for questions that show an information need. If you hear an announcement of a community health education series, for example, speak up and ask if there is a need for a course on finding health information on the Web. You have found from reading the professional literature that finding quality information on the Web is frustrating to the general public. Instead of trying to start your own community program, you could be part of an institutionwide effort. When suggesting your participation in the community program to your administrator, state your case in the language of needs assessment and how your participation fills a community need, as shown in the literature. Keeping informed about what is going on in the company is overall a useful activity, but it can also be used to identify gaps in library service or resources.

Primary Data

The effort involved in collecting primary data is one reason many small libraries do not do extensive needs assessments. The skills necessary for the various parts can be daunting, but it can be done. Be sure to check to see what help is available. Some large institutions have statistics departments. Ask around and see if any of the other managers have the skills needed to advise you. Many people are willing to mentor or advise their colleagues as long as they do not have to actually tabulate any figures. Your supervisor or human resources personnel may know who could help. All of the methodologies listed below require skills in identifying your target population, determining your sample, developing questions,
and analyzing the results. Chapters 10 and 12 cover these methods in greater detail. These are skills the average manager or librarian will have to learn anyway. Planning, budgeting, and communicating are skills most managers already have, and they can easily be applied to this task. A suggested planning method is the Logic Model, explained in Chapter 8. There is a section on budget planning in Chapter 12. Chapter 11 is all about different communication channels, including writing evaluation reports. So do not dismiss out of hand your ability to collect primary data. The rest of this chapter summarizes four primary data collection methods and how to analyze and act on the data they yield. Be sure to read Chapter 10 for more specific information on each data collection method.

**Surveys**

Formal or informal surveys can provide quantitative data for a numerically oriented question. For example: How many of the medical staff physicians use PubMed daily, weekly, or monthly? This kind of question can be quantified using a statistically valid sample and a well-designed questionnaire. An informal survey that costs less money can give you results that improve your understanding of the situation. The kind and quality of the survey you do will depend on the importance of the assessment to the stakeholders who are financially supporting the assessment. The techniques and resources outlined in Chapter 10 will assist you in developing a survey for your project. On the CD-ROM in the Chapter 4 folder, there are four examples of needs assessment questionnaires that librarians were kind enough to share.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a qualitative method of finding out about your users' perceptions. They are useful in situations where opinions are important, for example, to help you plan building renovations or to discover general needs you have not thought of. In a focus group, selected groups of people, usually from a subcategory of users, are brought together to answer a developed set of questions, and their opinions are recorded. This is useful if you are already planning on introducing a new product or service and want to fine-tune it. They can also be used as a preliminary investigation for a more extensive survey when you are not exactly sure what questions will give you the most useful information. Chapter 10 covers focus groups in greater detail.

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**On the CD-ROM: Needs Assessment Questionnaires**

In the Chapter 4 folder: Four Folders with sample questionnaires from:
- Camillia Gentry, Via Christi Libraries, Wichita, KS 67218
- Nancy Goodwin, Tremaine Library, Middlesex Hospital, Middletown, CT 06457
- Mary Peters, Medical Library, Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children, Dallas, TX 75219–3993
- Penny Worley, BioMedia Services, Scott & White Memorial Hospital, Temple, TX 76508
METHOD 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Observation
The qualitative techniques of observation can be used in specific situations where what is actually taking place is important. Observation can be used in a situation where what people report is not a reliable indicator. How well is a class going? How are people using the library computer center on a given day? Setting up a planned observational study with a checklist of selected questions for the observer to consider with space on the form for a narrative comment can produce some interesting results. Refer to Chapter 10 for more information.

Interviews
Interviews are an effective way to determine the opinions of your customers. Interviews can be used to ask one question of one person at a time at the circulation desk, or a set of questions can be developed to ask a sample of a population. Use of a set of predetermined questions, but allowing for personal interaction with the interviewer, can yield results that give a new understanding to the situation at the same time as collecting some quantitative data. By using the principles of good survey and questionnaire design as outlined in Chapter 10, this technique can yield rich and useful results. Issues of communication involved in interviewing are covered in Chapter 11.

Questionnaire Design
All primary data collection methods require sound questionnaire design. Chapter 10 goes over these principles and refers you to many resources in print and on the Internet.

ANALYZE THE DATA AND RECOMMEND A PLAN OF ACTION: STEPS 9–12

STEP 9. ANALYZE THE DATA
Once data has been gathered from secondary and/or primary sources, each source of data needs to be analyzed separately according to the structure of the data-gathering technique. Various charts such as run charts, bar charts or histograms, and scatter plots can be developed from data to illustrate trends and gaps. Descriptions of these charts can be found in Chapter 12. Using these analytical methods, within each source of data, you can iden-
tify the needs or gaps that you were looking for. The needs or gaps identified would then be listed along with any figures or dimensions that show the extent of need. This list could be based on the percentage responding that they have the need. If more than one data-gathering method was used, the different results should be compared. The matrix in Figure 4.3 will guide your analysis of the various data sources. For example, you could do side-by-side comparisons between data gathered in a focus group that had been categorized and data gathered in a survey.

Usually, you will discover the needs of various population groups are different. As an example, medical staff members may need more access to mediated searches, while assistants or medical students may need more education on the e-journal access system. Sometimes the most pressing needs cannot be funded or are impractical. They should not be discarded, however, but kept for future analysis. You should bring them to the attention of your administration even though they may not be able to be acted on in an timely manner. By documenting that a need has existed for some time, your case will be stronger when there are resources available for the service you wish to implement.

You could expand the needs assessment committee at this point to include some other management personnel with an interest in the topic. These might be people who have some influence on the implementation of new programs. They do not need to be part of the data-gathering portion of the needs assessment, but they could supply valuable information when it comes to setting priorities to remedy the needs.

Westbrook outlines a four-step process for analyzing results (Westbrook, 2001):

- Developing an overview of the data
- Running the statistical analysis
- Running the narrative analysis
- Drawing conclusions

The whole steering committee would be involved in Steps 1 and 4, but individuals or smaller groups could run the two analyses. Review Chapter 10 for an overview of data analysis issues and techniques and Chapter 12 for an overview of some tools of data display. The conclusions most likely would consist of a list of identified information needs of the group being studied. In the case study from the literature, the gaps identified were ranked by percent of respondents, as shown in Figure 4.9 (p. 88).
STEP 10. MAKE A DECISION AND A PLAN OF ACTION

Now is the time to make a decision and rank the results by assigning them a priority for implementation. It is interesting to note that most needs assessment literature centers on data collection and analysis and then seems to skirt over the decision-making process. Altschuld and Witkin discuss this in their book called *From Needs Assessment to Action: Transforming Needs into Solution Strategies*. In their experience as consultants, they saw many surveys shelved with no decision made or action taken (Altschuld and Witkin, 2000). The analysis you do in Step 9 will provide you with a list of perceived needs. Now all that remains is to determine which one or ones are the best to implement, assuming you cannot have them all. One method to make this determination is to use the Ease and Impact Chart, as described by Adam Englesgjerd and Cathy Larson—shown in Figure 4.8 (Englesgjerd and Larson, accessed: 2006).

List and number the possible actions that correspond to the needs identified by your survey. Get any additional information about each action that could help you make your decision, for example, cost information or staff time. For example, some actions would affect many customers (high impact) but would seem relatively difficult to carry out (low ease). Discuss with the steering committee each item to determine impact or ease. Generally, the actions to take first are those with high-impact activities that are relatively easy. Refer to the Englesgjerd Web course for a graphic example of using the chart (Englesgjerd and Larson, accessed: 2006).
This resource shows a step-by-step method of using an ease and impact grid. On a blank flip chart, draw two lines crossing each other to form quadrants. The vertical axis represents the impact a particular action may have. The horizontal axis represents the ease with which an action may be accomplished. With discussion, you can place your identified needs in each quadrant and rank them.

- The bottom left quadrant represents low impact and low ease
- The bottom right quadrant represents low impact and high ease
- The upper left quadrant represents high impact and low ease
- The upper right quadrant represents high impact and high ease

[Grid adapted from Englesgjerd and Larson (accessed: 2006)]
In the Crabtree real life evaluation from the literature, the following needs were identified during the analysis and ranked by percentage responding:

1. More library hours (20% wanted)
2. More materials for allied health and nursing (10%)
3. Improved library facilities (10%)
4. More library visibility, especially information about resources (4%)
5. Improved location needed (3%)

The needs were then rated in terms of ease of implementation and impact on the library users. Figure 4.9 demonstrates how these needs can be reordered using the Ease and Impact grid. The listed needs are described in column B, column A shows their rank according to the grid of ease and impact, and column C shows the rank on the Ease and Impact grid. The resulting list ranks differently from the list above, which is ranked only on percentage of response. This type of analysis allows the steering committee to make specific recommendations for action. It can result in small incremental changes or large sweeping ones, depending on the analysis.
Figure 4.9 Ranking of Needs by Ease and Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ranking re-ordered based on Ease and Impact analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Need being evaluated</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>More materials for allied health and nursing (10%)</td>
<td>EASE: Would need to re-adjust the collection development policy and a lot more money to these resources. These resources are generally less expensive than medical resources.</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IMPACT: A need identified by a large percentage. Would serve more allied health personnel.</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More library visibility, especially information about resources (4%)</td>
<td>EASE: More staff effort and some photocopying or printing of posters and flyers.</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IMPACT: Would encourage more users to use the services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Improved location needed (3%)</td>
<td>EASE: Same as number 3 below but perhaps could respond with more electronic resources that could be accessed from the desktop.</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IMPACT: If more electronic resources accessed from the desktop, more people would be able to use library resources.</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>More library hours (20%)</td>
<td>EASE: Need more staff to fill hours. Would be costly and hard to get.</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IMPACT: Highest ranked need for personnel who work the swing or night shift or for those who want to stop by after work. Hard to know if the users would come to the library during any new hours established.</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need improved library facilities (10%)</td>
<td>EASE: Costly and long term to implement. Would need major administrative buy-in and perhaps donated funds. mRecyclerView</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IMPACT: A high ranked need. Would encourage users to come to the library as a place to study and research.</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STEP 11. REPORT TO ADMINISTRATION AND EVALUATE THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Actions have been decided on based on the needs assessment and the prioritized list. Can you carry them out with your existing budget? Do you need a budget increase? Whichever is true, you now need to prepare a report that documents the whole process. In Chapter 11 and on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 11 folder, the Evaluation Report Template lists all the parts of a formal report. Charts and graphs useful in demonstrating the results are discussed in Chapter 12. The report from the Via Christi study mentioned above is available on the CD-ROM in the Chapter 4 folder and is an excellent example of a needs assessment report.

With needs assessment and other evaluation projects, there usually is one large or archival report that will contain all the data and all the documentation it took to accomplish the project. It could include documents and data on a CD-ROM. This report could be kept in the library to document the assessment for any survey activity, such as a visit from the JCAHO, or for any stakeholders to review if they choose to. If you feel that more than a few people will want to see the report, you should prepare two or three copies to circulate.

As mentioned early in the chapter, action must be taken because by doing the needs assessment in the first place, you implied your commitment to changing your practices based on the needs found. From the core report, you would prepare different reports for various audiences and stakeholders involved. The administration should get an executive summary and an offer to view the full report. The library staff would get a more detailed report and again the opportunity to view the full report. Library users might get a report that concentrates more on the vision and results than the methodology. Each report should be written using language appropriate for the audience. Chapter 11 goes over some of the issues in choosing your communication channel. The reports should tell the whole story but as briefly as possible.

STEP 12. REPEAT NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN THE FUTURE TO SEE IF THE GAP IS SMALLER

Needs assessments can and should be an ongoing part of any library operation. If a major assessment was done, a few years later perhaps a smaller assessment could be done to see if any of the previous identified gaps were filled. This could result in a report to administration of how responsive the library is to users' needs. The main concept here is that needs are always there and a needs assessment is a continuing process. In these times of rapid change...
in libraries and technology, it is important to keep up with the changes in your customer's needs. Developing a culture of assessment and evaluation among your staff would allow small and large assessment projects to be carried out more easily because your library will always be open to the idea of improvement.

Periodic needs assessments can connect the library operation to its users more strongly. When this is done, ownership of the library and its services is shared with the library customers (Silver, 2004). How many librarians say, "My library does this or that," forgetting whose library it really is? Needs assessments help establish the customer as the center of the service and bring the librarian and the library staff back to what is at the core of a library service: What do the library customers need?

REAL-LIFE EVALUATION: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This example is presented in terms of the needs assessment steps delineated in this chapter. Each step is listed, and then it is indicated that these authors did that step.


Abstract: The Medical Library staff of St. John's Health System, Inc., in Springfield, Missouri, conducted a needs assessment survey to document the library needs of nonphysician health-care personnel. The intended use of the survey was threefold: first, to collect baseline data from nonphysician health-care employees; second, to gather recommendations from both library users and nonusers to be included in library planning and improvements; and third, to promote the library during the survey process. Study results, along with an implementation report detailing actions taken to enhance strengths and address weaknesses identified in the needs assessment survey, are presented. Opportunities for further investigation of library needs also are reported.
REFERENCES


