Reflections

on Library Planning

at Crawfordsville District

Public Library

Bridgie Hackstaff Brelsford
Reference Librarian,
Crawfordsville District Public Library

The library planning process began at the Crawfordsville District Public Library in the spring of 1980 when Dr. Choong Kim, Professor of Library Science at Indiana State University, asked us to be the pilot library for his statewide project. During the next two years we worked with Dr. Kim, adopted some procedures from the ALA's *A Planning Process for Public Libraries*,[1] used ideas presented by Dr. Roger Greer in his Indiana Community Analysis Institute,[2] adapted a survey form from *the U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian*,[3] and added a few original procedures of our own. We set out to gain knowledge in four areas:

1) how the library was actually being used,
2) why some people did not use it,
3) how the staff perceived the library and its services,
4) the demographic make-up of our library's service area.

To obtain information, we conducted four difference user surveys, a non-user survey, two door counts, a circulation analysis, a staff survey, reference tallies, and a statistical survey of our community. In retrospect this seems rather well organized. In reality it was a trial and error learning process. After all, isn't that the function of a pilot in any project? We had moments of frustration and moments of enlightenment; it has been an interesting challenge.

One of the universal rules of library planning is "Don't collect more information than you are going to use." I have yet to figure out how you know before you get the statistics which will and will not be useful. Obviously, it is probably unnecessary to find out how many patrons own dogs in order to know that books on dog training are needed. On the other hand, early in our project we neglected to count the number of nurses in our medical community. When we corrected this we discovered 157 RN/LPN's and only 21 doctors. This figure explains why we have such a high demand for continuing education on nursing procedures.

A cardinal rule I would add is "Make sure you have someone knowledgeable in statistical analysis on your staff, or at least willing to help, before starting your project." It is true that some of the surveys are easy to interpret: the door counts, "What the Library Means to Me," the geographic distribution map, the reference surveys, the non-user survey, and some parts of the user surveys. However, comparison of data from the various surveys and adjustment of statistics requires training. Fortunately, Dr. Kim likes statistics. He is at this time working with the computer printouts from our last survey. Without his help many of our surveys would never have progressed beyond the data gathered stage. Even though we do not have that final report at this time, we do have mini-reports from each aspect of the planning process from which we have learned some interesting things and on the basis of which we have already made practical changes in our library's operations and policies.

The First Survey (May 1980)

From our first survey we wanted to identify the who, when, what, and how much of patron use. We were so anxious to get started we committed two errors, notably with regards to the timing and the distribution of the questionnaires. Being naive, we simply gave out the forms at the circulation desk and asked that they be returned when the library materials were returned. Only 80 out of 365 questionnaires were brought back. This was not a large enough response to make the statistics totally meaningful. However, it was a good learning experience for us and we did take note of the responses to two questions which seemed of unusual interest. In one case the answers indicated that 25 percent of our users lived outside our taxing area. Since we are in a county which has several unserved townships this seemed of potential importance. It needed further corroboration. In the second case, there was an unusually high response to "I look at exhibits." At that time we did not have any-

one on our staff responsible for exhibits. Displays just kind of happened if a patron offered to bring something in. However, with this indication of interest in mind, the next staff member who was employed was chosen, in part, for her artistic knowledge and experience in museum management. She has set up a continuous schedule of exhibits. In the 1981 user survey "Look at exhibits" came in 5th on the list of patron activities—topped only by 1) Browse, 2) Consult card catalog, 3) Check out materials, and 4) Read newspapers. This continued interest in exhibits indicates that by expanding this program the library is meeting a community need.

Timing was our second error. Here, again, we were anxious to get started. We did not stop to consider that by conducting the survey on the days surrounding Memorial Day weekend, we would end up with statistics showing virtually no student use of the library. Learning a lesson from this we planned our 1981 survey for the first two weeks of April. Now it looks as though the statistics may show a low response from senior citizens (13.7 percent for ages 60+ is not bad, but probably low). What we forgot to consider was that Easter fell on April 19 in 1981, so at the time of the survey, many of our senior citizens were still wintering in Florida. I hope the next time we conduct a user survey we will try it in October, when schools are in session and before the "snow birds" go South. I wonder who we'll lose then?

Door Count (July 9 and 12, 1980)

We chose a Wednesday and a Saturday for this count, hoping that they would be representative of our busy and slow days. We hired our pages for extra hours. Standing at the doors with tally sheets they used their own judgment to categorize people into three age groups: 0-20, 21-64, 65+. The sheets were sent to Dr. Kim for analysis. The results showed heavy use by women and children on Wednesday morning, which was not surprising, considering the fact that we have a children's film program that day. Of interest was the 60 percent/40 percent use by women over men. Not that we were surprised at the larger figure for women, but rather that when we compared these statistics, gathered over only two days, with a later count, taken over 2 weeks, the proportion remained almost the same: 64.5 percent/35.5 percent. It would seem that the earlier count had been more accurate than I had supposed it to be.

Circulation Study (June-July, 1980)

The purpose of gathering circulation data, in addition to the statistics which are normally kept by the library, was to find out which specific subject areas were and were not being used. Dr. Kim suggested two methods: the circulation analysis and the shelf list/shelf count.

Circulation analysis

First, for one week, we made photocopies of all book cards from the adult circulation. Only the call number, author and title were reproduced, not the patron numbers. Then, a sampling was taken of all adult book cards filed in the current circulation file. Every tenth adult book card was tallied by its class number. This represented circulation for a five-week period. We sent the photocopies and the tally sheets to Dr. Kim for analysis. The resulting figures showed in statistical form what was generally known by the staff, that in nonfiction our library has heavy demand for individual biographies, information on health, travel, authorship, handicrafts, sports, and cooking. Perhaps of more value, particularly during lean times, will be the information on which subject material did not circulate. But in order to know why the circulation in some areas was low we needed to determine whether this was due to a lack of patron interest or to a lack of books. Therefore we conducted the shelf list/shelf count.

Shelf list/shelf count

The purpose of this activity was to tell us the number of books supposedly owned in each class area and to compare this with the number of books on the shelves in each area at a given time. Using a little mathematics one ought to be able to calculate the number of books in circulation. Also, by noting the copyright dates of the books from the shelf list, the currency of materials is easily discernable. Here again, we gathered the data and sent it to Dr. Kim. Frankly, I was concerned about the validity of these figures. The adult nonfiction collection had not been inventoried for several years. We knew that there had to be discrepancies between the number of cards in the shelf list and the actual number of books in the collection. Our concern about this discrepancy, plus the crying need for more shelf space for new books, prompted us to start what we had intended to do for quite some time — we began a weeding inventory.

While working on the inventory, I felt I was receiving a more accurate picture of the collection because patterns of circulation are obvious from the book cards. I felt that perhaps the shelf list/shelf count had been wasted effort. However, I recently turned the inventory/weeding process over to another staff member. Now I realize that if statistics are not gathered and written down for all to see, then only the person directly involved with the inventory gains any knowledge. The methods we used for circulation analysis were too time consuming to do on a regular basis. If such data could be gathered and analyzed by computer, then I can see that this would be a useful tool for collection development.

The Non-user Telephone Survey (August, 1980)

We found that this survey gave us the best and most concrete information for the expansion of library services. We paid a member of our Friends group to do the telephoning. She contacted two homes on each block within Crawfordsville's city limits, and two or three homes on each road in the township. The names were taken from the geographic section of the city/county directory. About 400 calls were made, netting 199 responses. Of these, 106 people responded that they had either never used the library or that they had used it at one time, but were not doing so now. In order of frequency the reasons given for non-use were:

1) I'm just not a reader
2) I don't have time to read
3) I buy my own books
4) I have eyesight problems
5) I just never think about the library
6) I'm homebound/I don't have transportation

These presented a challenge, and a chance for immediate action. We decided that the best response we could make to answers 1, 2, 3, and 5 would be to expand the publicity on our non-book and reference services. The "poor eyesight" problem could best be met by an increased emphasis on our large print book collection, but unfortunately, we were not in a position to respond immediately to the "homebound" problem. The survey strengthened our desire to establish a home delivery service. This remains a top priority item on our goals and objectives.

Large Print Collection Analysis (September, 1980)

Before starting to purchase more large print books we felt we needed to know if we were correct in thinking that the predominant use of the collection was by women who were interested in religious/ inspirational literature. The methodology for this analysis was suggested in Dr. Greer's workshop. We tallied, by year, the number of circulations for each book in the collection, and found that our assumption had been wrong. The inspirational books and the classics rated very low when compared with mysteries, gothics and other current fiction. As a result of this analysis our selection of the new large print books was more in keeping with actual patron reading patterns.

Staff Survey (September 1980)

This was fun. We adapted a form suggested in ALA's *A Planning Process for Public Libraries*. Staff members were asked to complete it at home and return it within a week. So that their responses could be completely honest, they were told that the questionnaires would not be read by the director, but only by a neutral individual (Dr. Kim). He compiled the comments into a general report. It was obvious from the vocal comments during that week ("Those aren't fair questions." "How can I possibly choose which is more important, the . . . collection or the . . . collection?") that many of the staff had never before tried to prioritize activities. Nor had they ever considered the actual role of the library (educational, recreational, historical, archival, etc.) in the community. This survey was valuable as an educational tool for the staff even if it did not produce startling revelations to the administration. The main suggestion was "We need more staff."

Reference Surveys (February 1976 and February 1980)

In the 1980 survey we tried to determine who asked what kinds of questions at what time of the day, to locate areas in our collection which were inadequate for answering the questions, and to determine patterns of reference traffic. Our main problem was that during the busy times the staff did not have time to fill out the forms. Nevertheless we were able to compare the statistics on the number of reference questions with data which had been gathered in 1976 and found that the activities of the department had doubled in just four years. Therein lies one of the best reasons for collecting statistics, for without them you cannot document change.

Geographic Distribution Map (September 1980-September 1981)

This was also fun. We simply posted a county map on a wall close to the circulation desk. When patrons obtained library cards (new or renewal) they placed a pin on the map indicating where they lived. As areas became crowded we used different colored pins to represent clusters of patrons. The map was very pretty. It visually showed the wide area which we serve. Patrons loved it. It never became a definitive picture as it represented only one year's worth of borrowers and our cards are good for three years. We discontinued it because its ultimate value did not seem worth the added responsibility for an already busy circulation staff.

Second User Survey, Door Count, and "What the Library Means to Me" (April 1-14, 1981)

After almost a year of working with the planning process we felt we were ready to try the big user survey again. We rewrote the first questionnaire and arranged for Friends of the Library to staff the distribution tables at the main entrance of the library. Patrons were asked to complete, and return, the questionnaires before leaving the building. At the same time the Friends conducted a door count, using a hand-held punch counter. In addition to the user "Who-I-am-and-what-I-do-at-the-library" type survey we also distributed a "What the Library Means to Me" form, adapted from *the U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian*. On this form patrons were asked to check "Essential," "Desirable," or "Non-Essential" next to each service which the library was currently performing. A maximum of 10 minutes was required to complete both questionnaires.

Responses from "What the Library Means to Me" showed that the framed print collection headed the list of "Non-Essential" items; thus we felt sad, but vindicated, when it had to be the first item cut from the budget. The phonograph collection came in next, and that budget item has now been cut drastically. Granted, these might have been the obvious choices for our Director, but it is reassuring to have statistics to back up such decisions.

On the positive side, the top five "Essential" items were:

1) Librarians available to help find books and information
2) Purchase of new reference books
3) Purchase of new nonfiction
4) Continuation of current library hours
5) Instructional use of the library for school classes.

All in all this was one of my favorite surveys because it was easy for the patrons and they enjoyed feeling a part of the decision making process. Also, the amount of data was manageable by our staff; we were able to tally and interpret it without undue effort.

The same could not be said about the data generated from the larger "Who-I-am-and-what-I-do . . ." survey. There were 61 possible responses on 1037 questionnaires. We were fortunate that Dr. David Maharry offered the use of the Wabash College Computer for the tabulation of the data. Members of the Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity loaded the data and Dr. Maharry did the programming and supervised the project. As mentioned, Dr. Kim is currently working on a detailed analysis of this survey.

Before we turned the raw data over to Dr. Kim we did glean some interesting pieces of information. For example, on the use of the Local History/Genealogy collection:

AGE GROUPS	PERCENT OF PEOPLE USING THE ROOM
0 - 19	24.2
20 - 39	30.3
40 - 59	28.8
60 - 79	16.7

The largest use by any ten year age group was 23.4 percent by ages 10-19. If one excludes school use, the largest use was 18.2 percent by ages 20-29. This rather undercuts the standard assumption that Local History/Genealogy collections are used primarily by retired senior citizens.

Another area of interest to us concerned people who were doing their own school work. Our survey showed that 30.1 percent of females who used the library for their own school work were over 30 years of age; 21.8 percent of males using the library for their own school work were over 30. We had known, of course, that adults used the library for educational purposes, but never before had we known how many.

A fact to file under "Trivia": 16 percent of people using the library do so to do their children's school work.

Community Analysis (1980-1982)

In order to measure performance against a service population one must know how many people live there, what they do for a living, educational levels, etc. Trying to gather this data has been the most frustrating aspect of the whole project. Our basic problem

results from the fact that we are a city/township library. This means that city statistics are too small, county ones are too large, and there are very few figures available on the township level. Even trying to determine the number of school children was impossible because the school districts cross the township lines. We have one town in our county which is in three townships—only one of which is in our service area. When we began the project in 1980 we thought that we would be able to draw upon the 1980 census, but as yet that data has not been detailed enough to be of use. We ended up pulling figures out of a hodgepodge of sources. Dr. Kim says that the figures I have given him are "just fine." I am anxious to see the final profile.

The Future

Where do we go from here? What do we anticipate we will have gained by all this work? First, we need to study the comprehensive report. This will be done by the Director, the staff, and the Library Board. At this point we do not anticipate calling together a citizens' committee for direct consultation, although we may make a presentation of pertinent data to Montgomery on the Move, a newly formed group sponsored by our Chamber of Commerce.

We do not foresee any earth-shaking changes in our operations. The Director and the Board have already reviewed the mini-reports, and we have pulled out several items which the Board has backed as high priority projects. They saw the survey as a tool. If further budget curtailments are necessary we will consult the report. When we are able to expand again, we will do the same. It is possible that the real value of the entire project will not be evident until it is used for comparison against Crawfordsville District Public Library's next venture into library planning.

NOTES

[1] Vernon Palmour, Marcia Bellassai, and Nancy De Wath, *A Planning Process for Public Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980).

[2] "Indiana Community Analysis Institute," conducted by Roger Greer and Martha Hale, September 25-26, 1980, Indianapolis, IN. Sponsored jointly by the Department of Library Science, Indiana State University, and the Indiana State Library.

[3] "What the Library Means to Me," *the U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian* No. 34 (1980):3.