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Engaged Institutions: Using the Federal Depository Library as a Community Service to Address Regional Needs

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Introduction: Moving Towards More Engaged Libraries and Institutions

In February, 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities issued a timely report, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, which argues "we can organize our institutions to serve both local and national needs in a more coherent and effective way. We can and must do better." Federal depository libraries in academic and other type of libraries have always existed to serve more than just on-campus, ivory tower, or "scholarly" information needs, and therefore these specialized library government information services can help lead the way to broader institutional engagement, towards contributing more directly to an improved quality of life for a defined geographic region.

Background: Governmental Related Information and Data Needs in the Northwest Indiana Region

In 1996, the government information librarian at the Indiana University Northwest (IUN) Library obtained university-wide "Strategic Directions Initiative" funding to create the Northwest Indiana Center for Data and Analysis, in conjunction with the existing Federal depository library collection and service. A needs survey documented the perception that professionals and organizations in Northwest Indiana desired more specialized and value added information services in order to make more effective use of the increasing electronic access to governmental and related statistical data. Existing data sources were perceived not to be in a usable enough or current enough form. And existing data profiles organized around the State of Indiana as a whole or the Chicagoland area were not specific enough to describe the unique characteristics of geographic entities in Northwest Indiana (e.g., neighborhoods, communities, the region itself).

Developing a Context for Change

Below are trends or events that have been identified and applied to allow a specialized library (the IUN Federal Government depository collection and new Library Data Center

service) or a wider institution (the IU Northwest campus) to become more responsive to the needs of the wider geographic area from which the campus draws its students and faculty (the Northwest Indiana region).

- Professional Service vs. Community Outreach/Public Service/Regional Engagement

Service to the library profession at the state, national, and/or international level is very important but must not become valued more highly than or at the expense of effective and important community and regional based service and research. Service that applies a librarian's or classroom faculty member's teaching and research expertise to a community problem, or issue, develops an important and potentially fulfilling inter-relationship between the three faculty roles of teaching/performance, research/professional development, and service.

- Indiana University Regional Campus Excellence Initiative

In 1998, the five IU regional campus chancellors obtained funding for an initiative to investigate "best practices" of similar regional/urban area campuses throughout the United States. Six cross campus faculty/administrator committees have examined excellence in six subject areas, including community and public service. Regional service and community outreach are integral to a commuter university campus because students and faculty usually live, work, and are parts of families and neighborhoods near the campus, unlike residential campuses where students and sometimes even faculty may develop their own separate campus based communities.

- Community Service Inventories and Institutional Economic Impact

One way to analyze and better coordinate community service related activities is to survey and inventory all the current activities engaged in by faculty, staff, administrators, and even students – activities that target/benefit the broader community. By inputting the data received into a database, the information can then be sorted and retrieved in useful outputs (by type of service, name of activity, person's name, university department involved, community served, etc.). There are also accepted multiplier variables that can be applied to various types of service activities which can become part of an assessment of the dollar value (economic impact) an institution has on/brings to a community or region.

- "Engaged Institutions" and Related Literature

In addition to the Engaged Institutions report cited above, there are many additional reports, books, articles and Web sites on relevant topics such as service learning, problem based learning, interactive teaching, civil society and civic renewal, community based research, etc. (see attached bibliography).

- Seven Guiding Principles for Engagement

The Kellogg Commission report outlines seven principles or guiding characteristics that define an engaged institution: responsiveness, respect for partners, academic neutrality, accessibility, integration, coordination, and resource partnerships. The last of these is

especially critical since it is essential to obtain new funding sources for creative initiatives, and these sources can often only come by identifying partner organizations with access to these resources.

- Act Locally, Think Globally

While refocusing efforts locally and regionally it is equally important not to become isolated or removed from the interconnected and more globally defined issues that have community impact. One way the Library Data Center has been able to focus attention to international impact on the community has been through a contract with the local regional World Trade Council to develop a survey and database of local companies involved with trade and other international activities.

- Student Enrollment, Retention, and Use of Library and Information Services

Any attempt to grow your user base for library and information related services will be negatively impacted by decline in your traditional service support areas. For a university then that is (income) dependent on attracting and retaining students, there must be a positive return on efforts to become more visible in broader communities. Service learning is an example of involving students directly in a "learning laboratory," effectively applying theory to practical problems and helping students become interested in relevant learning and remaining lifelong learners. Many service learning classes relate well to library use and instruction since competency and problem based learning involves utilizing accurate information and data sources.

- Quality of Life/Livability Quotients

In its broadest sense, a university or public library exists to maintain and improve quality of life. With lack of trust in most governmental sectors, an often narrow focus on profit by business, the existence of many fractured families and communities, divisive religious bodies, etc., pressure is placed on education-related institutions to provide information, knowledge, and leadership to engage for community renewal and regional cooperation. Libraries and university research expertise can help measure quality of life and determine if it is improving.

- Sustainable Regional Planning

Communities must stop duplicating services and address problems through broader collaboration and cooperation. Long term (sustainable) planning needs to replace short term expediencies and pressures. Needs for both economic development and environmental quality must be addressed together. Universities have the expertise to contribute to such planning and librarians as generalists are able to see the big picture solutions and to help bring together the facts to promote informed decision making.

"Future Library" Services, Activities, and Outcomes

With change so much a constant it is wise to approach innovation in libraries as a way to bring what the future library will need to be as close to the present as is possible. Below are

some ideas for implementing such a strategy.

- Customer "Obsession"

With whatever information services are offered, there must be a component promoting individualized service that provides at least a beginning measure of these services for free. A service must produce a library customer who is satisfied and who has successfully obtained the information and data requested. The IUN Depository Library and Data Center services provide government information for free as long as the need can be supplied in 1-2 hours time and as long as the data required is not part of a "value-added" product.

- Distributed Information Literacy Instruction

Since it is desirable to empower library service users to search for information and data on their own, training workshops for groups and organizations is another important service that should be provided and that is in current demand. Charging a fee for in-depth instruction is an appropriate way of gaining income for providing the free customer service listed above. Instruction can also be distributed through technology means to areas throughout the region (workshops and sessions do not always need to be offered only at the central campus).

- Access to Content and Collections

Information and data services are not successful unless current, reliable, and trustworthy information/data is either owned by or accessible through the library providing the service. Therefore libraries must continue to invest in collections, subscriptions, and online access while at the same time helping devise effective gateway and subject access to this vast amount of information content. In addition libraries must help evaluate information resources while not censoring/limiting varying points of view.

- Value Added Information Products

Examples of value added information and data products are the following:

customized and formatted online literature searches,
assistance with actual grant writing,
community and industry data profiles,
marketing analyses based on reliable data estimates and projections,
workshops on various topics (such as how to use tool software),
administering surveys and analyzing results,
building databases,

visualizing data with spreadsheet charts/graphics/presentation software, etc.

Since these requests require advanced skills and services perhaps not offered by the local private sector, it is appropriate to charge or seek funding to provide these services which are not otherwise easily available. It is of course very necessary to separate fee services from those requests for Governmental information which must and should be always be provided free to all regardless of ability to pay.

- Partnerships for Information and Referral

When requests for information and services cannot be met by the library, it is very beneficial to have developed partnerships with community and regional organizations, because you are then able to knowledgeably refer the patron to the organization(s) that can assist. Here is a list of some of the regional committees that the IUN Government Information and Data Center librarian serves on both to be of public service but also to provide contacts for current/future funding and partnership:

IUN Community Outreach Partnership Regional Development Committee

IUN Community Resources Team

Northwest Indiana (NWI) Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration

NWI Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Forum

NWI Quality of Life Council Indicators Advisory Committee

NWI Regional Planning Commission Environmental Information Task Force

NWI Winning Communities Economic Development Committee, and

NWI World Trade Council Database Committee.

Creative Information Services Management

Effective administration of any service or organization today relies on application of up-to-date management practices. Below are some considerations to take into account when attempting to increase services and outreach beyond the traditional boundaries:

- Freedom to Fail

Librarians and information specialists must be willing to be risk takers. New ideas should be tried. When experiments fail, and many do, simply move on, assessing each success and failure along the way. Failure must be expected in order to allow for real successes to emerge. Librarians with faculty status and tenure protections can feel a little more comfortable that risk-taking will likely not jeopardize their career.

- Constraints and Challenges

Academic libraries are often part of a public higher education system that has each year received a smaller percentage of state funding. Libraries are support units and do not traditionally bring in income like faculty teaching courses do (library budgets are therefore easier to cut). Urban campuses are often not as easy to access and may have to fight images of not being safe, a perception of lesser quality programs, etc. At the same time, universities are still seen by outsiders as institutions with resources to bring to a community or region, not expecting to see the need to ask for outside funding in order to provide new services.

- Opportunities and Advantages

Universities and libraries have trust in society and are seen as a place where academic neutrality helps ensure objectivity. New services can often be priced reasonably using existing space, taking advantage of campus/library open hours that include evenings and weekends, and the already strong customer service reputation that most libraries have already fostered.

- New Sources of Income and Funding

Outside funding can be obtained through workshop training registration fees, "charging by the hour," proposals and contracts, foundation and grant funding, corporate giving programs, state and Federal project funding including overhead dollars that come to the campus, and matching dollar funds. Reallocation of time, avoiding duplication of services, utilizing volunteers, etc., are also creative ways to allow existing resources to stretch farther to support new endeavors.

- Avoiding Over-commitment and Stress

Librarians are usually already on 12-month contracts, which means that taking on additional responsibilities with new services can be quite stressful. Libraries are one of the institutions that have typically not been able to discontinue or scale back traditional services that have marginal benefit. Therefore one of the watchwords must be to "focus, focus, focus" on what is the most important. In addition libraries must plan and move quickly towards services that will be most needed in 5 years – this type of environment is stressful because so much in the future is unknown.

- Assessment and Evaluation

Outcomes from existing and new outreach services should be assessed in as many ways as is possible – through evaluation forms, amount of funding received, willingness to pay, repeat users of service, the contribution to student and faculty learning, etc.

Conclusion: Towards the Future Library

The above presentation is an attempt to identify issues that will allow a specialized government information and data library and the broader academic library organization to

remodel itself for tomorrow's needs. In this paper and presentation I have tried both to talk about outreach services for libraries as a whole and also to provide examples of how the government information and data services at Indiana University Northwest have tried to incorporate these ideas to become more effective. Anyone who would like to contact the author to discuss further any of these ideas is welcome to contact:

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