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JLAMS, the electronic Journal of the Library Administration and Management Section of the New York Library Association, continues its seventh year, and we are privileged to introduce the Spring 2011 JLAMS.

JLAMS provides a valuable outlet for the dissemination of articles, academic papers, and essays of interest to administrators and managers of all types of libraries: academic, public, school and special libraries. As administrators and managers, we have a lot in common, but we have few places to share what we know. JLAMS was the first peer-reviewed journal in NYLA, and the goal was to set a high standard for future publications. Readers of JLAMS are well-served by our team of referees, as are those whose contributions are published here. Submissions are always welcome. For information on article submissions, editorial policy, a submission form and more, visit the JLAMS website page at http://www.nyla.org/index.php?page_id=922.

Over the seven years that we have been publishing JLAMS, we have enjoyed working with many interesting colleagues. This month we have four articles that run the gamut from a digital imaging project at Queens, to an article suggesting we dig deeper in our user statistics to find more helpful information, to an article on how architecture and layout impacts more than space issues, to one with insights into two of the early Dewey free library initiatives. We hope you enjoy the articles and that you consider writing one yourself and sharing new information with colleagues to better our libraries.

JLAMS is made possible by NYLA membership. LAMS receives funding based upon the number of people who select LAMS as their primary NYLA section, as well as by those who pay an additional $7.00 to add LAMS as a secondary section. Please keep this in mind when renewing your NYLA membership. And thanks for your support!
Abstract: In 2006, the Queens Borough Public Library established a Digital Initiative to digitize the contents of its archives. The Initiative was formally launched in 2009, and at that time, I joined the program as its metadata librarian. I served on the committee that was instrumental to the program’s metadata policy, workflow design, and implementation. In the course of this work, I frequently revisited the program’s development phases and initial launch in order to focus my role. Reexamining this history allowed a deeper understanding of the program’s mission. From this perspective, in this paper, I reflect on and examine how the QBPL staff spearheaded the program and launched the administrative unit. I will discuss the key deliberations we undertook regarding the program’s institutional impact, major milestones we achieved during the developmental stages, and program-related discoveries we made in the process.

Introduction

This paper addresses both the reservation and the enthusiasm of libraries considering this kind of program. With careful planning, a digital imaging program can be set up on a shoestring budget with a library’s existing staff, and possibly with its existing organizational structure. I will show how our library was able to maximize productivity from a small budget and minimal organizational change, and I will also discuss practices that are helping to sustain the program for the long term. QBPL’s experience can serve as a paradigm for other institutions that are considering a digital imaging program.

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Literature Review

Digital imaging projects are complex and cover a broad range of topics. Kenney and Rieger (2000) serves as a comprehensive practical guide to building and maintaining a digital assets collection. Another comprehensive guide to digitization programs is Hughes (2004), which devotes one half to technical matters and the other half to strategic issues. Greenstein and Thorin (2002), a meta-study of the life cycle of a library’s digital program, theorizes on six case studies of large universities.

Major national libraries and organizations involved in digital libraries have set out guidelines for digitization activities. In 2000, the United States Congress established the National Digital Information Infrastructure & Preservation Program for preserving the nation’s digital materials. The Library of Congress, charged with carrying out the program, produced a detailed report of the program’s history, research, and project planning (LC, 2002). The Council of Library and Information Resources published a strategy paper discussing the rationales for digitization and institutional impacts of digitization projects (Smith, 2001). On behalf of UNESCO, the International Federation of Library Associations, and the International Council on Archives jointly authored detailed guidelines for digitization projects, including budgeting, human resource planning, and project management (IFLA, 2002). More recently, NDI-IPP formed the group called the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative in 2007 to “define common guidelines, methods and practices to digitize historical content.” The work of this group has been mostly technical in nature (FADGI, 2010).

The majority of the literature focuses on three areas: the history of digital programs, programs’ technical aspects, or digital collections. A few touch on organizational implications: Hunter, Legg, and Oehlerts (2010) describe their collaborative experience when bringing different skills and perspectives from both library and archives worlds; Sennema (2004) recounts his experience launching and implementing a digital media archive on a minimal budget using a new module included in the ILS; Boock (2008) presents survey results for distribution of digitization responsibilities in the organizational structure of ARL libraries.

In contrast to these other works, this paper focuses on the development and organizational support required for the launch of a large-scale digitization program from the middle administrator’s perspective. It is my hope that presenting this experience will help other libraries weigh the costs and benefits of launching a digitization program and find the best way to administer it.

Methodology

The founding of QBPL’s Digital Initiative and its eventual launch involved many parallel strands. Therefore, instead of using a chronological narrative, I organize significant events, milestones, and major decisions by topic. In each section, I reflect on my experience and discuss the issues that arose in the decision-making process, and analyze how the staff worked through the particular issues. Finally, I offer general, practical suggestion with regard to these issues.

Founding the Digital Initiative

Motivation for the Digital Initiative

The Digital Initiative at the Queens Borough Public Library was born out of a crisis in the mid 2000s. The Library was considering closing or significantly reducing the holdings in its Archives Division (formerly known as the Long Island Division), which collects materials documenting the history of Kings, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties, the four counties that make up Long Island. Proposals
were put forth on ways to dispose of the materials, but one in particular caught the attention of the senior leadership. This proposal was quite radical at the time—it called for digitizing the entire holdings of the Archives Division and making all materials freely accessible on the web.

As conceived, the Digital Initiative aligned well with the mission, vision, values, and strategic directions of the Queens Borough Public Library. At a time when digitization technology and web usage were both taking off quickly, the Digital Initiative would involve technologies that “carry the people of Queens into … the future,” provide “rapid and comprehensive access” to the digitized materials, and serve as an online “destination for informational, education, cultural, and recreational needs” (QBPL, 1991). In the remainder of the paper, I treat the further considerations that arose in the continuing development of this Initiative.

Benefits of the Digital Initiative

Affirmation of collection’s value.: Investing in digitizing library collections was seen as an affirmation of “continuing value of such resources for learning, teaching, research, scholarship, documentation, and public accountability,” and also as an affirmation of the library’s stewardship in these areas (Kenney and Rieger 2000, 1). In this sense, QBPL’s Digital Initiative brought the Archives to the center of library activities, solidifying its position as an indispensible part of the institution. Once on the verge of being downsized, the Archives would become the leader in digital assets management and online content delivery.

International recognition.: Online materials could be accessed remotely by users worldwide, including users far beyond the service area of the physical library. The Digital Initiative would raise the library’s profile beyond the library’s service region by showcasing the richness of the collection on the web.

Digitization as preservation: The Archives’ collections include items that are rare, fragile, unique, or all three. Digitization thus would serve as a means of preserving the contents of these materials in the long term. Furthermore, access to these materials was often restricted, because the materials were in fragile condition. Online access to digital images of the materials would provide much greater access, and at the same time decrease the demand for physical handling of these materials.

Digitization as cost-saver: Contrary to Hughes (2004, 51), the Archives believed that enhanced online access to digital images would reduce traffic to the Archives Reading Room, thus shifting some of the archivists’ time from providing reference to processing collections. The reduced use of the physical materials would also allow for more compact shelving. Finally, the ease of access to high-resolution images would improve efficiency of the Archives’ fee-based digital imaging service (discussed in the next section).

Lessons: (1) Digitization programs can be born out of the most urgent and unexpected circumstances, and administrators need to be prepared to take over the program at any state of gestation; (2) Digitization program staff need to be aware of the parts of the library’s mission that supports the digitization program; (3) Receiving continual support from the senior leadership is crucial; (4) The Digital Initiative brought many benefits to the library that went far beyond simply adding a web presence.

Digital Initiative Program Development

Activities Prior to the Digital Initiative

Electronic photographs database: The QBPL Archives had first experimented with digitization in the mid-1990s. The Division had digitized over 70,000 photographs and postcards, and created a database
using the software ApplicationXtender by a content management software vendor EMC. The staff spent roughly 5 years on the digitization, and many years thereafter entered image descriptions. Images were digitized at a wide range of resolutions and workmanship. Early in the project, images were created at 72 dpi using a hand-held digital camera; later in the project, a scanner was acquired and images were scanned at 300 dpi. The digital images had different borders and shading, and some images were out of focus.

All the images were and continue to be organized in the software database ApplicationXtender with some accompanying descriptive metadata, including photographer, year, location, category, and image description. The database can still be searched at one public terminal in the reading room and at one other staff terminal. The search engine supports some advanced search options, but the interface only provides searches for the exact data fields, which creates some inconvenient consequences. For example, image descriptions span four 128-character fields, and searching one field does not automatically search any of the other three. As another example, when metadata are exported to spreadsheets, peculiarities with the data are preserved in the export: locations and categories follow in-house controlled vocabularies that are inconsistently applied; descriptions longer than 128 characters flow into the next field; and text strings are all in capital letters.

This database has been serving as the main discovery tool for the Archives’ photograph and postcard collections. The item-level descriptions of images have proven to be a great asset.

The majority of library patrons have been able to navigate the interface and retrieve some images from the system. They have also been generally satisfied with seeing the images and descriptive metadata on the screen and seldom request to see the physical items.

Fee-based digital imaging service: The Archives offers a fee-based scanning service. After searching the image database, patrons can request high-resolution images scanned at 600 dpi. The Archives receives roughly 400 such requests annually, bringing in roughly $8,000 in revenue. However, the existing database cannot handle images in the TIFF format, the format in which these high-resolution images are scanned. So, without a viable way to add these images to the existing database, the newly scanned high-resolution images are deleted after each request.

Because of this fee-based service, the Archives had been equipped to support a rudimentary digital imaging operation. It already owned a high-end flat-bed scanner and image-editing software, and had staff members who are trained to maintain the equipment, use the equipment, and provide the service. But as we came to realize, what the library needed was a digital imaging program. As far as this fee-based service was concerned, a robust digital imaging program would be able to facilitate selection and retrieval of these images, save staff time for locating and scanning the physical items, and, hopefully, increase revenue. Although maximizing revenue was not the mission of the library, as we saw it, this service could potentially bring in much-welcome extra income to the Archives division.

Lessons: (1) A database design that adheres to open standards for its metadata and interface can increase its long-term viability as technologies change; (2) Remote access options through standard protocols (such as web access) should be seriously considered; (4) A digital imaging policy should ensure uniform image quality; (5) Program administrators should take an inventory of existing services and equipment as part of the program development process.

“The authors reported that an elegant teaching method for student learning is to incorporate online tutorials into a lecture-based session followed by an exercise with evaluative worksheets.”
Program Mission:

The mission statement for the Digital Initiative (QBPL 2009b) borrowed some language from the Library’s mission statement, but specifically referred to aspects that were unique to the program. (See Appendix A). The main objective was to digitize materials and make them available online, and the scope was all of the library’s archival collections. Two key points in this statement had significant practical importance in terms of influencing the subsequent development of the program:

(a) The Digital Initiative was to serve as the digital repository for all the Library’s unique and special collections. These might include existing and future collections, and might also encompass institutional records (because they are unique). The scope of the digital collection was later to be further codified in a Collecting Policy document.

(b) The Digital Initiative was to develop in three areas: database, metadata, and standards. Linking these three seemingly disparate areas was the unique feature that made the Digital Initiative a sustainable program, rather than a one-time project. Developing a database implied maintaining a formal database development life cycle; developing robust metadata would ensure proper item inventory and descriptions, and would prevent technological obsolescence; adhering to standards would ensure an open, widely compatible system that would be able to adapt to technological change at all levels, including changes in database technology, imaging standards, metadata standards, and web discovery tools.

According to the manager of the program, drafts of the Digital Initiative’s mission statement were circulated and inputs were solicited from the library’s senior leadership, especially from divisions that would eventually participate in digitization operations. After several rounds of discussions and revisions, the mission statement was approved by the Library Director.

Lessons: (1) The mission statement should mirror the library’s mission, while including elements specific to the digitization program that ensure the program’s long-term sustainability; (2) Serving as the institutional repository can be a monumental task, but can also help secure sustained funding to the program in the future as the repository becomes a significant part of the institution; (3) Program administrators should maintain constant communication with the senior leadership at this critical phase, garnering their participation and establishing their sense of ownership and responsibility to the program.

Feasibility Study

Even after the mission statement had been drafted, the Digital Initiative was only an idea on paper. The next step was to establish that the idea was actually feasible. However, performing a feasibility study for the Digital Initiative would have been moot, because it had already been established at this point, feasible or not. Nonetheless, this was an opportunity to analyze the work ahead. Since the scope of the program had been laid out, this analysis could delve into the triple constraints of project management: quality, cost, and time.

The two main deliverables outlined in the mission statement were the database and the metadata. The actual scope of the work entailed all of the collections in the QBPL archives (QBPL, 2011b):

- 36,000 monographs
- 2,500 cubic feet / 100 collections of manuscripts
Launching a Digital Imaging Program

- 4,500 maps and broadsides
- 105,000 photographs
- 425 feet of vertical files (roughly 2,500 files)
- 9,000 reels of microfilm (roughly 200 titles)

This list would require a total of roughly 150,000 discrete catalog records.

For the digital assets database, the library’s team of system programmers and IT department was already maintaining an ILS with over 7 million items in its collections (QBPL, 2011a). For 150,000 digital items, the library could either purchase or develop a system and manage its growth.

Most monographs, serials, and vertical files had already been cataloged in MARC; all manuscript collections had a finding aid; most photographs already had descriptions written. As a library that was acquiring an average of $9.0 million worth of new items annually in the past three years (QBPL 2010, 2009a, 2008), the new cataloging for cartographic materials, the catalog revision and data encoding and conversion could be absorbed into existing workflow and accomplished over the long term.

In terms of the triple constraints, the quality of the digital assets database was closely tied to its specification dictated in the Digital Initiative’s mission statement: adherence to open standards and access for “generations of researchers” (QBPL 2009b). Interestingly, time was not constrained, which implied that the quality of the work should take precedence over speed. The cost for launching this program would be minimal—it could even be launched at no additional cost since the library already had existing resources—scanning equipment, catalogers, systems staff, and IT staff—to absorb the additional workload. However, looking long term, additional staff might have to be added to administer the program and perform digitization job functions new to the library; additional equipment might have to be purchased for increasing speed and for imaging material formats not suitable for the existing flat-bed scanner.

Lessons: (1) In a proper feasibility study, a per-item cost estimate and a processing timeframe estimate would be useful; (2) Knowing the minimum resources required can smooth other departments’ anxiety about competition for resources.

Administrative Design:

**Administrative home:** The Digital Initiative’s objective was to digitize the holdings in the Archives. The feasibility study pointed out that a large amount of work would be devoted to creating metadata for the archival materials. The Digital Initiative should be administratively affiliated with either the cataloging department or with the Archives. Further consideration was given to minimizing handling the archival materials, so setting up office at the Archives was the best option. This administrative unit operated under the Digital Initiative umbrella, and was named the Digital Assets Management System (DAMS), physically sharing space in the technical services area in the Archives.

**Determining staffing level:** The feasibility study further revealed that collaboration across many departments was necessary—database development would involve systems programmers; data storage would involve the IT department; the user interface would involve the web design team; equipment purchases would involve the purchasing department; cataloging would involve the cataloging department. The library had two options: running the DAMS through committee, or assigning dedicated staff. The committee option would require gathering representatives from all participating departments, and the com-
mittee as a whole would supervise the operation of the digitization program. Regular meetings of this committee would maximize interdepartmental cooperation, but, while not requiring any additional staff, the program would not be the main focus of any one department. In contrast, a dedicated staff, even at a minimal level, could focus on handling all the unique functions of a digitization program and developing area expertise, while reaching out to other departments for collaboration. In fact, DAMS would benefit from having a manager who provided cohesion and leadership. The manager’s job would be to represent DAMS internally and externally, facilitate interdepartmental collaboration, make day-to-day decisions, and manage all the unique functions of the program.

After weighing the two options, the library’s senior leadership decided to assign a dedicated staff. The process of determining staffing level further identified two major job functions that did not exist in the library’s structure at the time—metadata creation for digital objects and the actual digitizing. DAMS was fortunate enough to be able to acquire approval for all three positions (manager, metadata librarian, and digitization technologist), and filled these positions through internal transfers.

**Lessons:** (1) The Digital Initiative could have been run out of any division or could have existed as a separate division in the library. But since a digitization program is like setting up a separate library and involves bringing so many separate library functions together, it is best for the program to be a single, dedicated administrative entity so that ground-level, day-to-day decisions can be made quickly; (2) One additional advantage is that a dedicated staff can develop expertise over time, which can lead to sustained interest and strength of a digitization program (also see Hughes 2004, 96-110).

**Budget Considerations:**

Program budget: It was no coincidence that all three DAMS staff positions were filled by internal candidates, because internal transfers did not incur any additional cost in the library’s over all staffing budget. So, other than a small supplies budget, the cost of setting up DAMS was minimal. Discussion on the cost for the actual digitization work is found in the following sections.

In-house vs. outsourcing. Hughes (2004, 93-97) weighs the advantages and disadvantages of contracting external vendors for digitization work. In DAMS’s case, the decision was mainly guided by the library’s funding mechanism for capital and operational expenses. An in-house digital imaging program required acquiring equipment, which would be purchased through the capital budget, whereas a digitization service contract with an external vendor would be paid through the operating budget. For an in-house operation, a book scanner, an overhead camera setup, the maintenance package cost roughly $100,000, which was miniscule compared to New York City’s average annual capital procurement of $10.2 billion from 2008 to 2010 (NYCOMB 2007, 2008, 2009). However, allocating the same amount for an outside vendor in the library’s annual operating budget, which averaged $127.2 million in the same three years (QBPL, 2008, 2009a, 2010), represented a much larger proportion, and would compete with many other library programs that provide vital services to the community (enough for one branch library to open on Saturdays for a year, for example).

Moreover, the outsourced portion covered only part of the digitization process. The library still would still need to spend resources on cataloging, hosting, and maintaining the digital assets. With the digitization equipment in-house, the library would gain greater flexibility over the pace of digitization, the design of the workflow, and the overall quality control of the process. In the absolute worst case scenario, where no operating budget was set aside for the program, the program could still potentially be run entirely by volunteers if the equipment were there. So, the DAMS manager initiated the procurement process with the city government.
Launching a Digital Imaging Program

**Lessons:** (1) Contracting an external vendor can speed up the process, but can also become very expensive in the long term; (2) "Developing policies for the worst-case scenario can help boost the imaging program's resilience to ever-fluctuating economic conditions."

**Sustainability Considerations**

After setting up the workspace and acquiring staff, the final part of developing the digitization program was to create policies and practices that would ensure its long-term sustainability as an organization.

**Organizational Sustainability:**

In order for DAMS to be sustainable, its organizational structure needed to be robust, yet flexible enough to adapt to changing needs and evolving technology, and its web presence needed to be aggressively promoted and updated. Internally, informal staff meetings kept all staff current on projects and allowed the manager to update other staff on external relations. The manager maintained regular contact with areas of the library that would become heavily involved with digitization work through monthly meetings with the heads of cataloging, systems, IT, web development, as well as administration.

**Technological Sustainability:**

Even though earlier analysis had shown that the demands of a new digital assets database could be met with existing IT infrastructure, DAMS would still make a number of specific demands to satisfy the unique needs of digital preservation. These included dedicated server space and shared drives, a high-capacity network among DAMS staff and between DAMS and the library’s servers, as well as data backup and recovery procedures that met preservation standards. There was also a potential for an increased demand for bandwidth on the public website after images went online. Although these demands were not unusual, the DAMS manager ensured that these requirements were met on an ongoing basis. The DAMS manager also discovered that the existence of a digitization program qualified the library for certain grant funding toward technology upgrades, which defrayed some of the cost.

**Content Sustainability:**

Sustaining the content would involve continual updates and securing rights for the digital assets. The DAMS manager drafted a collection policy to accompany the mission statement (QBPL 2009b). The collection policy specified what digital assets were to be included. Among the types of materials DAMS would collect were born-digital materials contributed by users, which included the public as well as the library’s staff. This policy would allow for documenting the cultural heritage not only of the area, but also of the library itself, functioning as an institutional depository.

A copyright statement was formally adopted by DAMS (QBPL 2009b). This copyright statement was modeled after the one in use in the Archives, and had been approved by the legal department. The library held the rights to provide access for private study, while users were responsible for any other use of the materials. However, since the Archives held a large amount of public domain materials produced before 1923, further examination of materials under copyright has been postponed.

**Lessons:** (1) Keeping stakeholders informed of current project development can ensure efficient collaboration; (2) Digitization programs can serve as a grant funding source; (3) A broad, forward-looking collection policy can keep the digitization program at the forefront of library service; (4) The program can begin digitizing public domain materials while copyright issues are being resolved.
Conclusion

From establishment of the Digital Initiative to the launch of DAMS, the library staff examined what embarking on a digitization project might mean to the institution. This examination involved weighing the advantages and disadvantages of such a program, analyzing existing resources and activities, studying the program’s feasibility, designing an administrative structure, and setting up sustainable practices. We learned that the new program should always strive to remain active, visible, and productive in the library. The program should set realistic milestones that are regularly met and communicated. The manager should find creative ways to incorporate the program’s needs into other departments’ existing operations. Acquiring other departments’ buy-ins not only minimized disruption to their operations and minimized cost, but also gave their staff additional satisfaction from delivering a new product or service. Library administrators can extract key points from this narrative, discussion, and analysis when considering setting up a digitization program.

Reference List


Launching a Digital Imaging Program


Queens Library’s Digital Initiative Mission Statement:

The Queens Library’s Digital Initiative is a web-accessible repository for digital assets from the Library’s collections. This unique and varied content documents Queens, Brooklyn, and suburban Long Island. The Initiative promotes the scholarship of Long Island by providing generations of researchers from around the world with expanded and enhanced access to this material using standard web browsers.

- The Initiative includes an intuitive web based discovery tool for customers to find the assets contained within the repository.
- The Initiative includes all the Library’s unique and special collections.
- The Initiative is a participatory, interactive and collaborative repository for its customers.
- The Library utilizes the latest storage and web-based technologies and inter-operative descriptive standards for its content.
- The Initiative is comprised of database, metadata and digital format standards.

Collecting Policy

In an effort to fulfill the mission statement of the Queens Library’s Digital Initiative the digital archives will contain the following material.

The digital archives will first and foremost consist of the Queens Library’s unique special collections of the Long Island Division that document Long Island. This includes digitized monographs, serials, maps, photographs, newspapers, art work, broadsides, 3-dimensional objects and more.

The digital archives will also be the repository for customer’s “born-digital” records documenting Queens, Brooklyn, Nassau and Suffolk. This digital archive will allow customers to submit their digital photographs, websites, blogs, newspapers and other digital media that document Long Island. The Library reserves the right to refuse the donation of materials.

Access, Reproductions and Intellectual property and donor restrictions

Furthering the mission of the Queens Library’s Digital Initiative to promote the scholarship of Long Island, the digital archives will provide open and easy access to its contents, as well as reproductions of this content upon request of the customer. On occasion this open access will be mitigated by the United States law governing intellectual property rights and donors’ restrictions detailed in the Deed of Gift.

The following is the digital archives’ copyright statement. The Copyright law of the United States governs the reproduction of copyrighted material. The Long Island Division is authorized to provide reproductions of copyrighted material only if the reproduction is used for private study, scholarship or research. Be aware that responsibility for copyright clearance to reproduce the reproduction rests en-
Launching a Digital Imaging Program

tirely with the user. Be aware the Long Island Division owns the physical object but does not necessarily own the copyright to the image.

In regards to access, the digital archives will provide access to all its content through the World Wide Web including the digital object and its corresponding catalog.
Value by the Numbers:  
Using Performance Metrics in Libraries

By

Debbi Olley Murphy and James A. Keller

Abstract: This article emphasizes the importance of using performance metrics in libraries. It argues that metrics can help libraries make a strong case for additional funding and prove their relevance, particularly during challenging economic environments. Additionally, performance metrics are a key part of strategizing and planning for libraries’ futures. The article also points out that, in addition to internal performance metrics, libraries should use industry metrics that are easily obtainable from other sources. Industry metrics give libraries an opportunity to compare their efforts to other libraries. The article concludes that performance metrics should be used regularly in libraries; numbers are measurable and far more difficult to dispute than anecdotal evidence.

Introduction

Recently, the news has not been good for libraries. The Great Recession has forced some libraries to close locations outright, and has forced others to dramatically reduce hours and staff. Traditionally, library administrators have been content to sit back and let the value of the public library speak for itself. Libraries were believed to be assets to the community, and users were assumed to know what they had to offer and how to take advantage of their services.

More recently, however, library administrators have been forced to acknowledge that they must increase awareness, among both users and budget-conscious elected officials, of their unique value to their communities. The economic crisis has forced all of us in libraries to think much more carefully about how we prove the...
relevance of our institutions. Performance metrics are an essential tool for proving that relevance to funders, grantors and customers. Additionally, performance metrics help to measure our successes.

To sum up, there are three particular areas where performance metrics can help the most: 1) they can help you build a stronger case for funding; 2) they can help you better judge whether your strategies are working; and 3) they can help you make better future decisions. Because performance metrics are quantifiable, they are harder to dispute than anecdotal information.

**Gathering Performance Metrics**

The most basic question for public libraries that want to use performance is: how do I start? The answer is with your ILS system. Every system can run internal reports on user statistics, collection, visitor count, circulation, and more; the trick is learning to choose the most relevant and useful. Once you know which reports you want, you can customize your approach. With the help of your IT staff or vendor, you can run daily, weekly, monthly and annual reports on the performance metrics of your choice. Table 1 below illustrates our standard performance metrics, which we run on a monthly basis. We also compare metrics with the previous year.

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<td>Visitor Count</td>
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<td>Gate</td>
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<td>Internet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Card Holders</td>
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<td>New</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Collection</td>
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<td>Additions</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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*Community Libraries
Using Basic Performance Metrics

For libraries, there are a few key metrics that are worth examining carefully; once particular numbers are gathered, they can be used to achieve the goals of making better strategic decisions and building a strong case for funding. As mentioned previously, performance metrics can also help determine whether your chosen strategy is working. Ultimately, performance metrics can help you plan and strategize into the future.

The first key metric involves **Circulation**. Which materials are circulating the most? Where are these materials circulating? Which materials are languishing on the shelves? Once these questions are answered, better decisions can be made. At Queens Library, we use performance metrics to drill down to the following circulation details: item type (CD, book, DVD), language (our collection includes materials in more than 50 languages), circulation per capita, and circulation per unique visitor.

Here is an example of how performance metrics can help library administrators make better decisions. At Queens Library, we had enjoyed a long history of circulation growth, but our performance metrics indicated that there was a significant decline in Chinese multisets. When we drilled down deeper, we learned the decline was system-wide, and not limited to a particular location or neighborhood. At the time, circulation of our Chinese materials accounted for about 20 percent of our overall circulation, so this indicated a significant problem.

Through additional study, we learned that the decline was the result of a couple of factors. The first reason was technology. Whereas at one time, a television series or soap opera might use five or six videocassettes (accounting for six individual circulation counts), now that same soap opera might be contained on just three DVDs, or even one, dropping our circulation significantly. The second reason was changing business practices in China. For a long time, public libraries in Queens were the only locations where people could find these multisets. But with a more open marketplace in China, leading to a wider availability of products, customers could pick up Chinese multisets at stores throughout the borough. Queens Library was no longer the only provider.

In this particular situation, using performance metrics helped to identify this situation and its causes, although it suggested no solutions. After we discovered what was happening with the multisets, we tried to see if we could expand our collection to provide materials that weren’t easily available in stores throughout Queens. When we discovered that that wasn’t the case, and also knew that improved technology would reduce our item counts, we were able to plan for a gradual decrease of Chinese multisets in our development and acquisitions planning.

At the same time, through a combination of using metrics and studying demographic information, we also became aware that more and more immigrants were coming to Queens from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Indian subcontinent. Accordingly, we were able to expand our collection to materials in those particular languages (Bengali, Urdu, etc.) and better service populations that were growing. Thus, with careful analysis, we were able to judge whether our strategy was working, and we were also able to plan better.

Using performance metrics helps us to plan our collection more efficiently. We have also begun to use a vendor, collectionHQ™, to aid in our collection development and acquisitions. Using this tool, we are able to target our audiences at a community library level.

CollectionHQ extracts our circulation data, and allows us to run specific reports that we cannot get from our own ILS system. We can see what hasn’t circulated in each of our 62 libraries on a monthly basis, and are able to weed the collection accordingly. With collectionHQ, we can also clean up our own catalog, no longer showing that, for instance, Queens Library at Hillcrest owns a book that is actually not on the shelf.

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1 See [http://www.collectionhq.com/collectionhq.html](http://www.collectionhq.com/collectionhq.html) for further information.
With collectionHQ, we can also run reports by genre (e.g. fiction), and learn what percentage of each library’s fiction collection has not circulated. We also are able to rank by author, which helps us define which authors circulate best in which communities. Using collectionHQ, we will soon be able to determine which libraries could better circulate titles from other libraries, enabling us to then “swap” materials between locations. This will serve to increase circulation in libraries. Thus, using hard numbers, rather than anecdotal data, we will be able to build better collections in our libraries.

The second key metric for public libraries is Visitor Count (also known as gate count). At its simplest, this metric tracks the total number of people who come to Queens Library daily both in person and virtually. Utilizing performance metrics, we have been able to discover, for instance, that our “virtual” visitor count has increased by more than 50 percent since last year. Because we analyze both the number of physical visitors and the number of visitors to our website, we’ve learned that over one-third of all visitors to Queens Library are now virtual visitors. Armed with this information, we can better tailor what we offer to our customers. For instance, we have recently begun an “e-initiative”; because so many of our customers use our website, we are striving to provide increased choices of digital media for them. And, through our Text-A-Librarian service, we are serving customers who are used to getting their information from their smartphones.

We have been able to use Visitor Count in another way. When we analyze these metrics, and discover declines in physical gate count, we have worked to figure out an explanation. Has that library been undergoing extensive renovation? Have there been weather problems? If we learn that, in fact, those issues are not present, we delve deeper, and do an in-depth analysis of the library itself. We try to find out more about what customer service is like at that particular location, or whether there has been a change in management. When we begin with Visitor Count as our metric, and drill down from there, we can work to discover what the particular issue is, and try to solve it.

The third key metric we analyze at Queens Library is Program Sessions and Attendance. In this category, we study the number of sessions we offer, the total attendance, and average attendance per session. While it may be tempting to simply look at this at face value, gathering only totals, we have found that careful analysis of this metric can yield important data for us. For example, it can tell us which types of programs are most popular. We can also find out if we are promoting the programs that customers enjoy the most or spending too much time offering programs that don’t matter as much to our customers while neglecting programs they really want. Thus we can judge whether our current strategies are working and strategize for the future.

A fourth metric that can help us focus is details about New Cardholders. We can not only track how many new customers apply for a Queens Library card each month, we can also use this metric to help us focus on strategy. Specifically, we can drill down to discover which neighborhoods are bringing in more people. Because we have 62 libraries across many Queens neighborhoods, it makes the most sense for us to study new cardholders by individual library. But for other public libraries, it might make sense to look at particular zip codes or neighborhoods. Where should library staff plan to hold card registration drives? Different libraries will find different ways to reach out to specific populations to engage customers in libraries where use is less or build in libraries where usage is greater.

Performance Metrics and Staff

We are fortunate at Queens Library to have a full-time demographer on staff. Because Queens is such a diverse county, the demographics shift very often, and we need to make sure we are serving our entire population. While we use the metrics mentioned above very regularly, we also are able to harness the knowledge of our own staff to gather even more information. After we run standard metrics, for example, our demographer is able to help us analyze what is going on in each library’s location, in terms of which ethnic groups have moved into the area and also which groups have left. That information is so valuable for us, both in collection development and in planning programs. For example, a library that may have had a large Hispanic population just five years
ago now has a growing number of Chinese immigrants. Once we have these key facts, we can work to make each library in our system a destination.

Using Industry Metrics

While libraries should analyze their local performance metrics, it can also be very helpful to also consider industry metrics. With data from such sources as the Public Library Data Service Statistical Report (PLDS), see sample page below for example, a library can compare its statistics with that of similar library systems. If one library is serving a population of 300,000 but is only receiving an average of $10 per customer in funding, it can compare its numbers to a similar library that is receiving $30 per customer. A case might be made to argue for a larger budget or to demonstrate local efficiencies. Usage statistics can be valuable to demonstrate support for local budgets.

Industry metrics are also available other sources. In addition to the Public Library Data Service Statistical Report (available for $135 on the ALA website, under PLA/Publications and Products), there are also statistical reports available from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). With statistics collected by more than 9,000 public libraries, this is an excellent source for comparison. The American Library Directory is yet another source for industry metrics. Additionally, each state has reports on its public libraries. For example, in New York State, the database Bibliostat Connect contains data from the Annual Report for Public and Association Libraries.

The table on the following page, taken from the 2010 Public Library Data Service Statistical Report, contains annual use figures that include Queens Library. The table analyzes circulation statistics for public libraries sorted first by population size. It then separates circulation into print materials and electronic (CD/DVD), with a separate section for all other materials. In addition, the table analyzes circulation at each library’s central location, then by branch.

While the sources cited above can be very helpful when researching performance metrics in libraries other than one’s own, it’s also essential to research the literature. For example, an article (Gallagher 2010) in The Bookseller, a trade publication that covers international libraries, shows a statistic of note: borrowers favor fiction over nonfiction. An article such as this one can guide public libraries, ensuring that they’re purchasing more fiction than nonfiction.

Another article from Library Journal (Malczewski 2011) indicates that, despite worries of DVDs being replaced by streaming video, public libraries have very high DVD circulation (2.1 million items each day), second only to Netflix (2.2 million). Researching current library statistics can assist libraries with collection development and strategy. Without this knowledge, it’s harder to make strategic and sound decisions.

Conclusion

The value of gathering performance metrics cannot be overstated. More and more, libraries have to justify their very existence to government legislators at the federal, state and city level. They need to prove why, in a time of increasing free information, they are still relevant. By using performance metrics, libraries are able to use hard numbers to prove how indispensable they are. They can show how many customers are using their job information resources, how many customers rely on them to provide value-added information, and how many customers are getting free literacy classes at their local library (just a few examples). With performance metrics, libraries are much better equipped to show how much their communities need them.
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<th>Value (thousands)</th>
<th>Value (hundreds)</th>
<th>Value (tens)</th>
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**Value by the Numbers**
Notes


Abstract: As public libraries evolve in the 21st century, they may need to provide more services with the same or less funding. Architects can influence the costs associated with energy use, building maintenance, and staff size. This article will investigate potential efficiencies in those three categories.

The discourse on public libraries in America is obfuscated by questionable assumptions. One is that the public library is on its last legs, because printed books will cease to exist; that assumption seems to have been disproved by increased activity and increased circulation of the collections in most public libraries. (We have yet to understand the potential impact of ebooks). Another is that digital technology will create an efficient new prototype so that libraries can be staffed more efficiently than in the past; as far as I can tell, there is no automatic connection between digital technology and efficiently run libraries. The third and more hopeful assumption is that the library itself is continuing to change from a storehouse for collections of under-used books to an active community cultural center; evidence shows that this change is in fact occurring.

As libraries evolve, operating costs change. Libraries may be asked to do more with the same or less funding. As architects, we can influence energy use, building maintenance requirements, and staff size. Based on my firm’s work with new and transformed libraries and our understanding of their operating budgets, we estimate that the average costs for utilities are approximately 4 percent of the annual budget; building maintenance, 4 percent; and personnel, 70 to 80 percent. This article will investigate potential efficiencies in those three categories.

Saving on energy and maintenance costs

Energy and maintenance costs are intertwined. Architects and engineers are currently striving to create sustainable buildings. Such designs use locally available, natural materials, and use the least possible energy from fossil fuels, while harvesting energy from natural sources. Libraries designed or renovated today will consume approximately one third of the energy of their predecessors. Within the next decade, it will be common practice to construct zero-energy public library buildings — buildings that will produce enough energy on site to offset the costs usually associated with purchasing energy from utility companies.
Sustainable buildings and sustainable sites are also connected to maintenance costs. Building exteriors can be constructed of materials that may require no maintenance for as long as 50 years. It is also possible to design buildings in which the interior finishes are durable enough to be maintained by simple cleaning instead of more costly painting and recarpeting, etc. Similarly, library sites can be designed in a manner that does not require irrigation, does not require expensive exterior lighting, and does not require regular repaving. Through careful design, the costs of site maintenance can be dramatically decreased.

Recent examples from my practice include the new Darien Library, which uses approximately 50 percent of the energy of a current code-compliant building. When compared to buildings constructed 20 to 30 years ago, it consumes approximately 25 percent of the energy required to power older structures of similar size. The Goodhue Library at the Hackley School in Tarrytown, New York, was recently reconstructed from the remnants of a 105-year-old building. The transformed structure uses about 10 percent of the energy of the original on a square foot basis.

**Staffing and technology**

The largest cost of any public library is personnel. What are the factors that might contribute to a more efficiently operating public library?

The ongoing technological revolution has certainly changed the operation of public libraries. Nearly every library has an OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) digital card catalogue, and quite a few libraries have adopted the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) system for self-checkout and return of items borrowed from the library. These innovations can lead to significant staffing efficiencies.

Another technological efficiency is the automated material handling system, a Rube Goldberg contraption that can actually save significant amounts of time. The material handling system sorts returned items into categories and empties them into rolling containers. Those items can then be immediately reshelfed, readying them for recirculation, while employing the time of fewer staff members. Accommodating a material handling system is a significant design effort. It is generally understood that material handling systems are more appropriate for larger libraries and may not add to the efficiency of smaller ones due to the costs of installation and maintenance of the machinery.

Libraries of all sizes can purchase books that have been preprocessed and precatalogued. Although this is not related to building design, it does save time for library staff and reduces the need for professional librarians for cataloguing, arguably with the potential disadvantage of less nuanced classification.

Any library, whether old, renovated or newly constructed, can adopt technological innovations. Often, one or two of these techniques may be adopted with little effect on staffing. Every library may strive for efficiency, but some achieve this more effectively than others. As an outside observer, I have noticed widely varying densities of staffing in comparably sized libraries. I might enter a mid-sized public library (20,000 to 50,000 square feet) and encounter five or six staff members at the circulation desk. I might enter another and encounter only one or two. And I might visit a third library and find no circulation desk at all. When coordinated effectively and accommodated intelligently in the building, current technologies will lead to significant savings in staff time.

**Staffing and configuration**

Architects influence the layout and configuration of the library building more than any other factor. The key issue is visibility — how much of the library building can be observed from any one point. A common theory we encounter in designing smaller libraries is that a one-story building will be easier to observe than a multi-
story building. In fact, vertically arranged space might be easier to observe. Imagine trying to see an entire supermarket from one location, as opposed to a typical atrium building, where we might see two or three levels simultaneously.

The basic premise is to design spaces that are interconnected and transparent to each other, not spaces that are compartmentalized and separate. The program of space requirements for the library identifies specific functions and the space required for each. Thus, we typically design a separate reference area, a children’s area, a nonfiction area, a community auditorium, and a place for digital media and recent acquisitions. These functions may require separate identities and may require sound separation between them. Nevertheless, it is possible to walk into a library and see recent acquisitions, the children’s area, the fiction collection, the library café, and the lobby of the meeting room all from one location. This interconnection among various functions is facilitated by the use of transparent materials and by arranging the plan of the building to promote visibility. Interconnection and transparency can result in a spacious library that operates with fewer staff members than are typically required.

**Four public libraries — two traditional, two innovative**

I recently evaluated the layout and organizational patterns of four public libraries. Two of these libraries are organized in a traditional, 20th-century manner, and two are more innovative.

- The Greenwich (Connecticut) Library is organized in a traditional way. It has grown over time by accretion and is now an expanded, compartmentalized building on four separate levels, requiring an unusually large staff.

- The Dobbs Ferry (New York) Public Library is also organized in a traditional manner. It is a small library, situated on only two levels, with reasonable openness and transparency. As a result, operating the library requires fewer staff members per square foot and per daily visitor.
The Princeton (New Jersey) Public Library has been designed with some innovative features, but still maintains a circulation desk. The library is situated on three levels and is relatively compartmentalized, which adds to the size of the staff required for its operation. The library is actively used by town residents and visitors.

The Darien (Connecticut) Library is more grounded in the 21st century. It is situated on three levels and a mezzanine. It has no circulation desk and uses an RFID system as well as an automated material handling system. Together with these technological innovations, the building’s interconnected and transparent design allow for more efficient staffing.

Comparing the data

The spreadsheet (Appendix I) that accompanies this article is divided into basic data, staffing and use, and reveals some interesting information:

- The size of these libraries varies from 16,000 square feet to 104,000 square feet.
- The collection sizes are directly proportional to the size of the building, with 3 to 3.7 items per square foot in each of the four libraries.
- The number of items in circulation varies from 15% to 33%.
- In the four libraries, digital media account for approximately 30% of the items in circulation, no matter the size of the library or its collection.
- The two more compartmentalized libraries — Greenwich and Princeton — require more staff, as can be seen in the square feet per FTE staff member column. Dobbs Ferry and Darien require approximately one staff member for 1,700 square feet, whereas Greenwich and Princeton require approximately one staff member for 1,100 square feet.

The elementary conclusion we might draw from this data is that more interconnected and transparent buildings can be staffed more efficiently.

Parallels and disparities can be drawn from an analysis of the data provided, even though the sampling is small. We can see easy-to-understand similarities, such as the 3-3.7 items per square foot, and big dis-
parities, such as the differences in the number of visitors and the number of employees required to staff the libraries.

Final Thoughts

This article started by identifying three questionable assumptions — the imminent demise of libraries, technology as the panacea, and libraries as community cultural centers — and then identified four strategies for cost saving: energy efficiency, low maintenance costs, staffing efficiency related to new technology, and staffing efficiency related to building configuration. What can we conclude?

• The library is increasingly an important community cultural center.

• Based on emerging technologies in the operation of libraries, patrons (users) are becoming more autonomous.

• A potential result of digital technology and automation is a reduction in staffing requirements.

• The spatial organization in public libraries is becoming more open, transparent, and interactive instead of separate and compartmentalized. Staffing reductions are facilitated by increasing the openness and transparency of the library.

• With the elimination of the circulation desk and, perhaps, the reference desk, the librarian’s role may become more flexible and more collaborative with those seeking help and information.

• Public libraries are ideally suited to be models of sustainable practice because they usually require stable indoor climates, and they can serve as examples for the public. Sustainable buildings should be constructed to be permanent and easily maintained.

With the introduction of digital technology and new ways of accessing information, the library has become a more important community institution. This has defied all the predictions of 10 or 15 years ago, which had forecast the decreasing importance of public libraries. We are now designing the space for a much different institution than the library of the 1990s. The public library must be run more efficiently and must be designed to facilitate that efficiency. At the same time, the functions of the library are in flux, based on new technologies, new media, and new cultural patterns. By nature, buildings — especially sustainable buildings — are relatively permanent. Our challenge is to design substantial public libraries that can accommodate continual change.
Library Architecture Influences Library Efficiency

Appendix I

Chart 1: The chart compares basic data, staffing and use in four public libraries.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Local Population</td>
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To Dewey or Not to Dewey: Libraries Go Dewey-free

By Maureen McGrath

Abstract: Through first-person interviews, this article describes the process and experience of switching over a library’s non-fiction collections to a more BISAC-like system and presents the problems and the solutions that two New York libraries have encountered when undertaking this project. Previously published articles have supplied historical reference.

The Dewey Decimal System has always seemed sacred to librarians and their patrons. But since the Perry Branch of the Maricopa County Library District in Arizona began to use subject categories in place of Dewey numbers in 2007, this whispered heresy has become more like a scream, especially when the Frankfort Public Library District, IL tweeted “Our Adult Colls r officially DEWEY FREE” in 2008. An often-heated debate started on-line amongst library professionals.

The subject first came up in the Julia L. Butterfield Memorial Library, located in Cold Spring, NY, in early 2010 when the Library closed for a week to do some much-needed weeding and reorganization of the adult collections. The idea was predictably startling but, during the re-shelving process, began to be seen as a practical change that would greatly enhance the library experience for patrons. As the non-fiction books were placed back on the shelves, the staff began to notice just how unintuitive the Dewey System could be for browsing because subjects and related topics were not always found together.

“Gardening books were on one shelf and books about plants several bookcases away with home organization and child care in between--It just didn’t make sense,” said Maureen McGrath, Head of Library Services. The same held true for the fishing enthusiast. Fishing technique was on one shelf while lures were practically on the other side of the room.

Director Gillian Thorpe met with her staff and explained the concept of Dewey-free to them. It was decided to start in the Children’s Room so that any issues or problems could be ironed out before the process was attempted on the Adult collection. (The plan is to change the Adult Non-Fiction in summer, 2011). All non-fiction books would follow the lead of the fiction titles and spine labels would reflect the first three letters of the authors’ names. Thorpe felt that her patrons were used to looking for books by the author’s name since it has followed that form in fiction and biography.

“If you are looking for a book on “dogs” within the category “animals” whether they are sorted by author or title, they wouldn’t necessary be next to each other on the shelf,” she says. Titles could range from “Caring

Maureen McGrath is the Head of Library Services, Julia L. Butterfield Memorial Library
Her email address is jblprograms@gmail.com
for Your Dog” to “The Guide to Dog Care”. Each book would have a classification label to identify its subject. These classification subjects would be identified in the catalog system as part of the call letters to make searches uncomplicated. For example, *Poetry for Young People* by Robert Louis Stevenson appears in the catalog as “STE Poetry”. On the spine of the book, the spine label reads “J STE” with a bright yellow sticker featuring a feather pen and the word “Poetry” underneath. In another example, *Let’s Look at Cats*, by Harriet E. Huntington, appears in the catalog as “J HUN Animals” and the spine shows “J HUN” and a blue sticker with an alligator and the word “Animals” positioned beneath.

The staff--including the “Dewey expert” Head of Circulation--embraced the idea and began a word-of-mouth campaign among the patrons. As expected, there was some opposition to the notion of a Dewey-less library but most of the staff looked forward to the change with enthusiasm.

The process began with weeding the collection and the staff made notes on the various categories into which the books fell. Classification research was done on-line and at various bookstores. Many of the standard category headings found in these places worked as a starting point for grouping the library’s collection and a list of categories was created, loosely based on the Book Industry Standard (BISAC). (See Appendix 1 for the Butterfield Library’s list of categories, arranged in the order that they appear on the shelves.) The advantage in handling every book is discovering exactly what subjects have gaps and which are up-to-date and complete. Relocation of subjects was based on patron demand and need for visibility. Classification labels were ordered from Library suppliers like Demco or Brodart.

Two of the first categories to be changed over were Poetry and Folk & Fairy Tales. In their new location, the collections looked orderly and easily recognizable by their bright classification labels. “I’ve heard patrons exclaim ‘I saw the poetry books as soon as I came down the stairs,’” says Thorpe.

Because of the relatively small size of the Butterfield Library’s collections, the process has been fairly straightforward and most books have easily fallen into categories with labels available for purchase. Labels didn’t exist for some categories such as “Vehicles” (including cars, trucks, trains and airplanes), or “Hobbies & Games”, so the staff created labels with clip art.

The library is open seven days a week with no slow time that would enable it to be closed during the reclassification. As a result, the process has taken over six months. As the project winds down, the books that are left are the more difficult to define and categorize. “Much of it is subjective because many books can easily fit into more than one category,” explains McGrath who has spearheaded much of the project. One book that needed a lot of thought and discussion was “Construction Tools”, by JoAnn Early Macken. “On the surface, it looked like it should go under building, architecture, or even hobbies but, after looking at the content, it was much more about the people who use the tools and so we placed in the “Careers” category”, say McGrath. “I needed to think where our patrons will most likely look for that specific topic,” she says.

Another series of books that stumped the staff were some survival guides that focused on specific natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes. Because they were all natural disasters, McGrath decided to place them under “Nature” where the rest of the weather related books were classified. Later on, a few more books with more general “survival” stories surfaced and it was decided to purchase “Adventure” labels and create a new category that hadn’t been considered necessary at first.

Time was not a luxury offered the Albany Public Library System when they made the move to abandon the Dewey Decimal System in their branch libraries in late 2009. The System was rechartered eight years ago and during the subsequent six years, all the branches were renovated and two new branches were built. According to Mary Coon, Head of Collection Management Services for the Albany Public Library System, the
idea of Dewey-free was first brought up in July, 2009 by Executive Director Carol Nursinger, less than six months before the Pine Hills branch was scheduled to open. “We were in the process of ordering materials [for the new branches] and Carol asked me what I thought about going Dewey-free and I said ‘Cool’,” says Coon. “I was a little nervous about telling the head of circulation,” she adds.

Once the decision was made, they had about two weeks to map out the categories for each branch before the orders needed to be placed. Book supplier Baker and Taylor initially balked at relabeling the entire order for the Albany Public Library System but soon came on board when Coon and her staff agreed to identify and to supply the distributor with the new categories themselves. The company will, in fact, pre-label book orders with BISAC categories.

To begin, Coon, like Thorpe of the Butterfield Library, went to the area bookstore to see the categories and how they are arranged. Then Coon and her coworkers went through the collections one Dewey number at time. “It took hours and hours of going through the Millennium System”, she says. Because the libraries were closed for the renovations, they were unable to look at the physical collections on the shelves. Due to this complication, Coon feels she would have rearranged the layout of the shelving a little differently had she known in advance about the enormous change. She feels a Dewey-free collection needs a little more breathing room and that the concept works best where shelving is lower and wider. “It’s more Dewey-free friendly”, she says.

“The timing of the project was our biggest challenge,” says Coon. “We needed to relabel the collections for three branches at once so we used the same categories for each,” she says. Knowledge of the community is essential and the layouts of the collections were adjusted for each particular branch’s needs. For example, Pine Hills has a large Chinese language collection while the Delaware branch needs to highlight their Spanish language collection. Unlike the Butterfield Library, The Albany Public Library System chose to arrange the books within the categories alphabetically by title rather than author. “We felt it would create a more organic grouping,” says Coon.

At nearly a year into the Dewey-free system, it is still considered a work-in-progress. “We will get to a point where it’s mostly set but there is always room for tweaking,” says Coon. This flexibility is one of the benefits of a Dewey-free collection. It allows subjects to be rearranged as topics become more fashionable or seasonable.

At the Albany Public Library branches, the reactions from patrons have ranged from considering it “really cool” to declaring the librarians crazy. “The Dewey-free collection has helped for perusing the shelves, but it can be frustrating when a patron is searching for a very specific book--uber-patrons know Dewey,” says Coon. She also reports that shelving is harder for the staff. However, at the much smaller Butterfield Library, the staff has enjoyed locating books or reshelving materials now that the shelves are more clearly laid out.

It is likely that the size of a library is directly related to the success of a Dewey-free collection. Indeed, there are no plans to switch over the enormous Main Branch of the Albany Public Library System due to the academic nature and size of the collection. As reported in *The Dewey Dilemma* by Barbara Fister, (Library Journal, October 1, 2009), proponents of the traditional Dewey System stress that the nuances of DSS allow for “a level of granulation in topic areas that general subject areas [such as those found in a bookstore] cannot duplicate.” Both libraries agree that good signage is key to making the change easier for both staff and patrons.
Circulation figures have hinted at the success of the project. “In the past, fiction was always much higher than non-fiction,” explains Coon. “Now it’s about even she says. The Perry branch in Arizona has also cited increases between the fiscal year 2007/2008 when their average circulation was 28,693 and that of fiscal year 2008/2009 when the figure rose to 39,693. The records at the Butterfield Library, as well as anecdotal notations by the staff, have revealed an increase in non-fiction circulation, too. Thorpe looks forward to seeing what the year-end reports will reveal about actual increases in non-fiction circulation. On the whole, Coon is glad they made the switch. “We’ve had some very interesting reactions,” she concludes.

Periodical Sources Used


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