Taking the Pulse of Your Users and Potential Users

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Academic Libraries

Source: https://niu.edu/law/library/index.shtml
Why is this Important?

- Efficient Use of Funds
  - What resources to invest in?
  - What projects should you spearhead?
  - Invest in new tables, chairs, computers, etc.?
  - Purchase a new product?

- Data to Support Proposals

- Is your library inclusive? Are you overlooking systemic biases?

- You don’t know what you don’t know, so ask
What should you use?

- Depends on your patron base
- Smaller Patron Group
  - One-on-One Interviews
  - One-on-One Conversations (anecdotal)
  - Focus Groups
- Large Patron Groups with Similar Demographics
  - General Feedback Requests
  - Resource Use statistics
- Large Patron Groups with Diverse Demographics
  - Surveys
  - Focused Feedback Requests
Academic Libraries

- Large and (hopefully) Diverse Patron group
- Primarily focused on Students and Faculty of the Law School
- Secondarily focused on non-law students and faculty, bench and bar, alumni, and public (if applicable)
- Need a system that will give you the most bang for your buck
- Surveys focused on the Primary patrons is your best option (the benefits will “trickle down”)


Why Surveys?

- Surveys allow for mass circulation of questions to larger population
- Surveys are not dependent upon complete feedback
  - Literature varies on an appropriate feedback response, but between 20-35% is considered average for a valid response rate
- Surveys can get at other demographic information which can help determine whether certain library services are inclusive or exclusive
Overview of Survey Software

- **Google Forms** – reliable for smaller surveys; easy to use for surveyors and those being surveyed. Free.
- **Doodle Polls** – good for dates or individual questions. Too limited for multiple questions. Free
- **Commercial software** – price ranges and tools will vary based on your needs.
  - Always a chance that the company will donate or discount the software for university
- **Qualtrics Survey Software** - available at many academic institutions
  - Limited to academic purposes
Methodologies

- What Question are You Trying to Answer?
- Surveys are meant to be broad, but focus them as much as possible
- Types of questions:
  - Multiple Choice
  - Multiple Answers
  - Follow up
  - Yes/No
  - Open Ended
- What are you going to do with the feedback? Is it actionable or meant to provide support for proposal?
Question: Should NIU offer more CLE?

Preconception: It would entice more attorneys to come to and participate in NIU activities, broadening the appeal and leading to increased cooperation between Bench and Bar and the College of Law. However, it will be costly, and there is no guarantee that people will come.

Is any of this true? We won’t know until we get some data.

Survey Focus: Alumni and local attorneys since (1) we have a built in contact tree for alumni and (2) local attorneys are more likely to attend CLE in person.
Case Study: Northern Illinois University

- **Types of Survey questions:**
  - Would you attend CLE at NIU in person if it cost money?
  - Would you attend CLE at NIU online if it cost money?
  - What types of CLE topics would entice you to attend a CLE

- **Ways to reach out:**
  - Alumni email lists (drawback: limited to NIU graduates)
  - Attorney email lists (drawback: only attorneys who have participated in NIU events in the past)
  - Bar Association Directories (drawback: not necessarily public information)

- **Status of Survey: On Hold for Near Future**
  - Drawback: for some institutions, you will need to go through levels of “bureaucracy” to get a survey off of the ground. Don’t give up!
Other types of feedback opportunities

- Prompt feedback after a demonstration
- Make it fun
- Roaming Reference Services
- Build it into curriculum
- Attend networking events and solicit input directly
Government/Public/Membership Libraries

Source: Gail Wechsler, taken at Law Library Association of St. Louis
Why Use Assessment Tools?

- Important for a Public and Membership Law Library with historically declining usage
- Evaluate What Resources are Being Used
- Find Out What New Initiatives Could Work
- Assess Pros and Cons of Library Communications Strategy
- What is Working/What is not Working
Main Types of Assessment Tools

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- One on One Interviews
Surveys

- Determine Your Goals
- Determine Best Audience
- Craft Questions that are not biased and ask only one thing per question
- Keep it Short
- Vary Type of Questions
Sample Survey Questions-Library Members

- As a member of ____library, I use the following services [multiple choice/check all that apply]
- My primary reason for being a member of the library is [multiple choice/single answer]
- Would you use any of these resources if they were offered at the library [Yes/No]
- What suggestions do you have for new resources we should have at the library [open ended]
Pros and Cons of Surveys

- **PRO**: Precise way to take pulse of user groups
- **PRO**: Free to low cost
- **PRO**: Easy to do multiple surveys to different groups
- **CON**: Potential low response rate
- **CON**: Standardized answers lack nuance
Final Thoughts on Surveys

- Online vs. In Person
- For Online, Send More than Once
- For Online, Consider Incentives
- Analyze Results
Focus Groups: Pre-Meeting

- Establish Goals
- Questions: General to Specific
- Questions: Core of Six
- Practice
- Prep to Record in Some Way
- Incentives to Participation
Focus Groups: At the Meeting

- Set Ground Rules First
- Nametags and Ice Breakers
- Aim for Conversational
- Ask Follow Ups
- Techniques for Getting Full Participation
- Final Thoughts
Focus Groups: Post-Meeting

- Record Results/Summarize Notes Quickly
- Share Some of Results with Participants
- Thank Participants
- Follow Through on Top Recommendations
Sample Focus Group Questions

- (For Library Members): Why are you a member of the library?
- Describe how you feel about the _____ database access we have in the library? How often do you use it? Is it adequate or do you think it is missing any items and if so what are those?
- How do you feel about the CLE offerings so far this year? Have you gone to any and why or why not? What additional types of CLEs (speakers, topics) would you like to see?
Pros and Cons of Focus Groups

- **PRO**: Get multiple perspectives in interactive setting
- **PRO**: Can ask follow up questions, get more nuanced responses
- **PRO**: Get benefits of group brainstorming
- **CON**: More costly and time intensive than surveys
- **CON**: May get skewed responses if some not willing to speak or if a few people dominate the session
One on One Interviews

- Why Do These (as Opposed to Focus Groups)?
- Try for Cross-Section of Users/Potential Users
- Consider Your Goal
- Core Questions
- Listen, Listen, Listen
- Follow Ups and Staying in Touch
Sample Questions for One on One Interviews

- Have you ever visited the Law Library Association?
- If you have ever used the library or been a member, what services did you use?
- What “library” services do you have/use now at your firm? (ex: subscription to Westlaw; any hard copy publications and if so which ones?) What do you use often but not have in your office library? What would you use if you could access it for free or lower cost?
- Can I add you to the LLA of St. Louis general email list?
Pros and Cons of One on One Sessions

- **PRO**: Can get in depth responses
- **PRO**: Helps build relationships with users and potential new users
- **CON**: Very time intensive
- **CON**: Realize only get one person’s opinion
Resources

- Resources on Surveys
  - https://zapier.com/learn/forms-surveys/writing-effective-survey/

- Resources on Focus Groups
  - https://www.naylor.com/associationadviser/tips-for-conducting-focus-groups/
  - https://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/focus-groups.htm
## Resources

### Making Your Own Surveys
- Library Research Services - Resources ([https://www.lrs.org](https://www.lrs.org)).

### Survey Case Studies
- Sally Wambold, *Finding an Elegant Solution to a Failed Wiki*, AALL SPECTRUM, May 2013, at 41.

### Other Resources
Conclusion

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