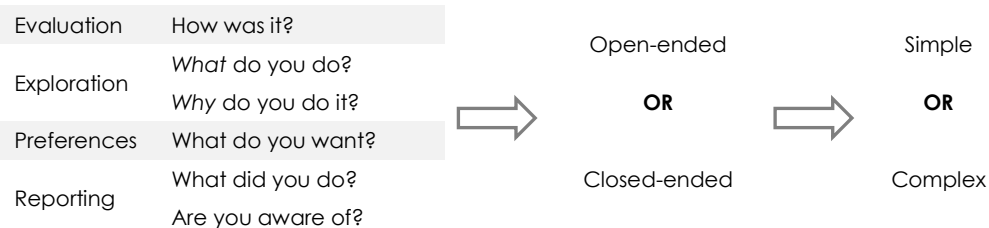9-2023

Library Assessment at a Glance: Information Needs, Questions, and Methods

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Types of assessment questions

		CAN BE:
Evaluation	How was it?	
Exploration	*What* do you do? *Why* do you do it?	
Preferences	What do you want?	
Reporting	What did you do? Are you aware of?	

Open-ended **OR** Closed-ended → Simple **OR** Complex

Best options for assessment information needs

Information need:	Question type:			Best options:	Notes:
Liaison program awareness	Reporting	Closed-ended	Simple	Survey	Respondents may not understand jargon, but this is OK in this case because that provides information re outreach
				Interviews	
Liaison program perceptions	Evaluation	Open-ended	Complex–jargon/analysis	Not recommended	Example: "What do you think of the Library's liaison program?"
	Evaluation	Semi-open-ended	Complex–jargon/analysis	Not recommended	Example: "On a scale of 1-10, are you happy with the Library's liaison program?"
	Evaluation	Closed-ended	Complex-possibilities/limits	Survey	
			Less complex		
Liaison program needs	Preferences	Open-ended	Complex–jargon/analysis	Focus groups	Focus groups are preferred over interviews because group interactions may lead to better understanding and new possibilities
			Complex-possibilities/number		
			Complex–explication		
	Preferences	Closed-ended	Complex-possibilities/limits	Interviews	An interview format is preferable due to complexity unless statistical analysis is desirable
			Less complex	Survey	
Library collection needs	Preferences	Open-ended	Complex-possibilities/number	Interviews	
	Reporting	Closed-ended	Simple	Use statistics	We have data from LibQual as well as use statistics (e-resources and circulation)
				ROI	
Library space needs	Preferences	Open-ended	Less complex-jargon/analysis	Focus groups	
			Complex-possibilities/number	Observations	
			Complex-explication	Way-finding	
	Preferences	Closed-ended	Complex-possibilities/limits	Survey	We have data from LibQual

MORE QUALITATIVE ↑ / MORE QUANTITATIVE ↓

Method:	What it does:	Best for:	Not for:	Notes:
Use statistics	Quantitative analysis of actual use patterns, often of library collections Allows for statistical analysis	Closed-ended exploration and reporting questions	Somewhat limited utility due to problems with data collection methods and inability to ask follow-up questions.	
ROI	Analysis of expenditures to returns, either in monetary values or services with monetary values	Closed-ended reporting questions	Somewhat limited due to problems with identifying and collecting all types of data.	
Questionnaire surveys	Used to discover if an observation can be generalized to a population Allows for statistical analysis	Closed-ended questions	Complex questions When you're unsure how to analyze and report results	
Interviews	Similar to focus groups	Open- or closed-ended questions when the topic is sensitive		Can be structured, semi-structured, or exploratory Requires training Very high time-cost Results are not generalizable
Focus groups	Look at topics up close	Open-ended questions	Sensitive topics	Can be structured, semi-structured, or exploratory Requires training High time-cost Results are not generalizable
Observation	Wait, watch, write	Open- or closed-ended reporting		Great for library space questions Can have a high time-cost Results are usually not generalizable
Usability studies	Identifying problems with usability, efficiency or satisfaction with a product or service	Open- or closed-ended evaluation, exploration, and reporting questions		Encompasses many methods Requires training
Qualitative surveys	Used to explore trends and emotional tenor or to seek non-generalizable ideas for improvement	Open-ended exploration	Low-cost assessment Iterative assessment	Requires training in qualitative methods Very high time-cost Results are usually not generalizable
Way-finding	3D usability testing of how patrons navigate spaces or services	Open-ended exploration and reporting		Great for library space and signage questions Results may be generalizable to the population studied, but are subject to temporal shifts High time-cost
Ethnography	Used to gain a deep understanding of a population		Low-cost assessment Iterative assessment	Encompasses many methods Requires training in ethnographic methods Extremely high time-cost Results can be generalized, but only to the population studied

Notes on complexity

Jargon/analysis	Results are difficult to analyze if it is unclear that terminology was understood
Less complex	Less complex if a detailed list of options/services are listed
Possibilities/limits	It would be difficult and perhaps limiting to try and list all of the possibilities
Possibilities/number	Respondents are more likely to forget options or tire of the survey if there are many possibilities
Explication	Respondents won't know all of the possibilities without some explication; an in-person format is preferable

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