
Lean Libraries Optimize Outcomes!

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Abstract

Showcasing value is an ongoing challenge for libraries. For more than a decade, Delaware libraries have been learning to design strategy, processes, and assessment based on methodologies used by businesses (Gore, DuPont, Siemens, and more) to achieve performance excellence. Additionally, action research was conducted with a “focus on the customer” which supported development of tips, tools, and techniques that patrons can use to maximize their informal learning while also documenting the libraries’ contributions. The practical implications so far—support and funding for Delaware libraries—increased exponentially! Although primarily applied to Delaware public libraries, this approach has potential for showcasing value in all types of libraries. Adopting the “library business model” methodologies can help all libraries measure and maximize library value.

Public Libraries serve diverse needs every day:

- The preschooler, exposed to reading through story time
- The teen who wants to experiment with new technologies
- The senior who is seeking community connections and conversation
- The adult who has a dream and wants to start a business
- The senior who is seeking information about family legacy and ancestors
- The student who needs help with homework and school projects
- The immigrant who wants to learn English
- The single parent, who wants to take charge of finances
- The middle-aged adult, who was just laid off and desperately needs a job
- The homeless person, who needs shelter, food, and, in some cases, mental health care
- The person who needs assistance with computers and devices

And on and on...

To manage the diversity of needs that public libraries support, it helps to organize libraries’ work conceptually. We designed the Dewey/Maslow framework for organizing library services and library data as a result of training in business tools, or tools that businesses use to achieve performance excellence. Lean is one of those tools. Lean is a method to make visible the cause and effect of what we do, how our processes and systems all

hang together in the “business model,” or library service model. Lean helps us sequence and think through the consecutive steps in the processes, from the inputs to the outputs, and to the outcomes for the customer:

- To ensure that our processes for delivering services are effective and aiming high
- To reduce waste and maximize our resources and effort
- To measure the cause and effect of what we do—which is what our funders want to know

The Dewey/Maslow framework uses two macro-organizers to encompass all potential services and community needs. Libraries support all subject areas, organized by the Dewey Decimal Classification system (the x axis). Libraries support all needs, from basic needs to transformational, organized using a modified version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (y axis). Since Delaware libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification System for their collections, the installed base, we now use that same taxonomy to track and align with programs and reference questions. Libraries, historically, have extensive methodologies for collection development and management, developed over many years. However, libraries do not have a similarly holistic and systematic methodology for program and services development.

Lean training also emphasized the use of live data in order to effect improvements. We embarked on establishing statewide systems in order to obtain shared live data. Delaware libraries now

have statewide systems, including a statewide ILS (delawarelibraries.org), a statewide calendar, and statewide reference data collection. We now have three years of trend data by subject (Dewey), statewide. We have inputs and outputs by subject for:

- Reference questions, where we are seeing lots of activity in assistance with devices and Reader's Advisory;
- Program Attendance, where we see activity in Summer Reading, Arts, and also Jobs and STEM; and
- Circulation, which consists of mostly fiction.

Subject is the match point, and is used as an indicator of what Delawareans are trying to do. Monitoring the patron use by subject is useful to help us identify emerging trends earlier, so we can be proactive in addressing community needs. Currently, the Dewey/Maslow framework is used in various ways and in several formats. A poster version is used at meetings and events for capturing information and for planning. Excel spreadsheets are used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, and for drafts of dashboard displays.

A systematic framework for library services is useful to determine current value and is also useful for strategic planning and to identify gaps in services. Libraries need to quantify their value to decision makers at *each level* that they are funded, such as local, regional, state, etc. Libraries are encouraged to use the Dewey/Maslow framework to view their services strategically, within their own library and in context with their neighbor libraries and libraries statewide. Libraries can use the Dewey/Maslow framework for an individual library, and for regional library services, too. When all the stories and data are organized in the Dewey/Maslow framework to see the cause and effect of what libraries offer to communities, it helps our funders as well as library staff see the benefits, too. By strategically organizing, connecting, and measuring library work across all our services, libraries can be more effective and influential in helping communities to evolve and transform.

We are beginning to look at community indicators, along with the Delaware Community Foundation, to see how the library outputs line up, and so we can see how libraries *contribute to* improving the community indicators. We can then adapt library services so that we increase the contributions to improving the community indicators. We align

our Delaware partners with our framework, too. We currently have over 130 different partner organizations statewide, and more organizations join us all the time. The partners can use the framework to see who else they might partner with, and libraries can see where gaps are and in what areas we may need to seek additional partners.

In addition to the quantitative data by subject from our systems, we experiment with other methods to obtain the “voice of the customer” for input. Community conversations held in libraries are sorted by Dewey/Maslow for strategic planning. Delawareans are encouraged to capture their reading and learning over time. The original action research regarding informal tracking of curiosity and learning was conducted through a program called Learning Journeys, held in libraries and other venues throughout Delaware over several years. The program consisted of conversations with Delawareans about their informal learning paths, and any methods that they used to track their learning. Tips, tools, and techniques for tracking interests by subject are available in the Unleash Inner Genius libguide (guides.lib.de.us/unleashinnergenius). Beanstack is the online tool used statewide. Print tools called Learning Journals were developed, and 15,000 updated versions of each tool were recently published in summer 2016. The three-ring binder insert is targeted for children, and the smaller 5x7 journal is intended for teens and adults. Tracking enables individuals to make their learning and inspiration concrete and to build upon it, and also helps them identify and quantify what benefits they have received from libraries. Library services are expanding to provide additional experiences across all subject areas, and Delawareans are encouraged to sample a variety and to explore new passions. Expertise occurs *within* a discipline; innovation occurs *across* subject areas. Routine capturing of patron outcomes and next steps (with permission), along with the use data, all organized in the Dewey/Maslow framework can be used for ongoing library service development.

Our latest passion poster campaign for marketing libraries features Delaware legislators and other leaders. Like a READ poster campaign, but with a focus on passions rather than a particular book, we invite legislators to a photo shoot and ask them to bring along an object or symbol that represents their passion or inspiration. The response from the legislators, and their passions, has been fascinating, including:

- One legislator, a farmer, brought an enormous sweet potato and a ceremonial pitch fork
- Another legislator, a professor, brought a bust of Benjamin Franklin
- One legislator, a triathlete, brought her medals and running shoes

A professional photographer takes portrait photos and records a short video clip of the legislators talking about their passion or inspiration, how it was sparked, how it has influenced them over the course of their lives, and how libraries can help develop these passions. We inform the legislators that Delaware libraries support all subject areas and all types of interests that, with their example and encouragement, can further fuel the passions of all Delawareans. The legislators receive their own individual passion poster. Thumbnails of all of the passion posters are sorted and displayed in the Dewey/Maslow framework to show the variety of passions. A large version of the thumbnail poster will be provided to each public library once photos of all of the legislators have been obtained.

The Lean systematic approach to library services over the past decade has been beneficial for Delaware libraries in many ways. State officials,

including Governor Markell, Secretary of State Bullock, and the General Assembly, supported the development of the statewide library technology infrastructure, and now fund 100% of all public library technologies. The state also provides up to 50% of funding for public library construction, and, with their support, library capacity has increased significantly as well. In an era of data-driven decision making, having live data has been essential to reporting on the value of their investments. Our next steps involve further work with partners on community indicators, more professional development for library staff, additional work on data management and display, and research on program development. We have found that other professions have a more defined methodology for program development that can possibly be adapted for libraries, and will perhaps provide techniques to support even greater outcomes for Delawareans.

Optimize your library's outcomes by learning from Lean! For all types of libraries, using the Dewey/Maslow framework for library services can help you organize, maximize, and showcase *your* library's value!

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