

Identifying Potential Data, Evidence, and Input



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U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Identifying Potential Data, Evidence, and/or Input

Existing Information

Information from the Literature
Information You Must Gather

What data do you already have access to?

- Consider a **data audit** to understand the data your library already collects or has access to.
- **Connect on campus** to discern what data others on your campus have access to.
- **Explore the literature** to discover what others before you, perhaps at similar institutions/libraries, have found.

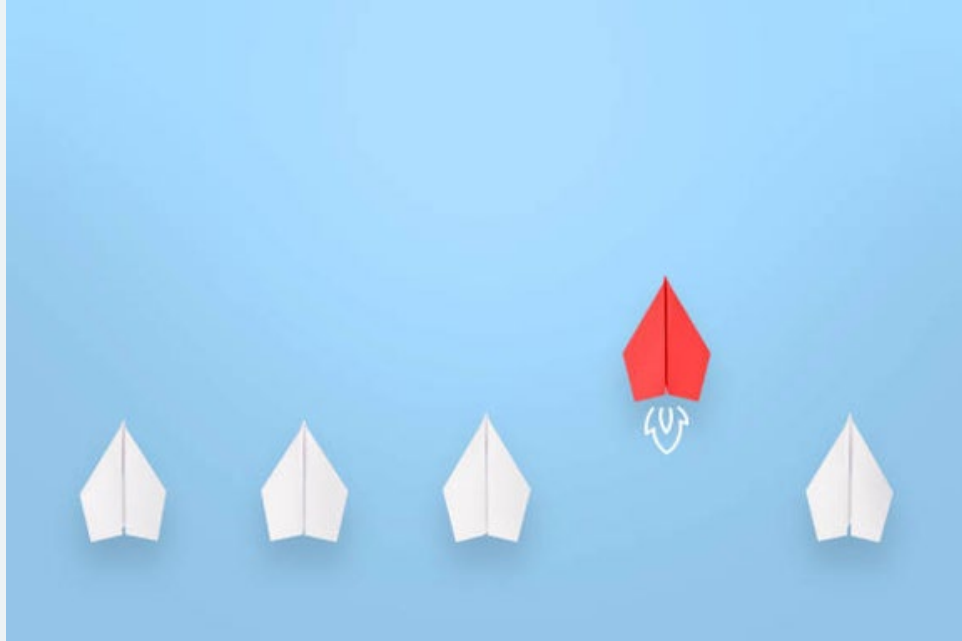


What type of data is each element?

- Input
- Output
- Outcome
- Librarian time/effort
- Use
- Satisfaction
- Service quality
- Group-level
- Individual-level
- Something else?



In what ways is each data element relevant?



- **meaningful** to users/stakeholders
- **formatted** according to user/stakeholder preferences
- **useful** to library management of services, resources, spaces, etc.
- answers **open questions**
- enables **decision making**
- enables **resource allocations**
- enables **actions**
- worth **sharing**
- related to focus areas, strategic priorities or needs
- related to professional or other standards

How might librarians access the data element?



- available
- not yet available
- in library information systems
- in supplier/vendor information systems
- in institutional/organizational information systems
- in consortia/state/national information systems

What **processes** are required to access the data in usable formats and in alignment with data best practices and ethics?

How is (might) the data element be disseminated?

- in library communications
 - internal-facing
 - external-facing
- in planning documents
- in presentations



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Sources for Pre-Existing Data

- Published literature (journals, books)
- Publisher data repositories (accompanying published literature)
- Presentations
- White papers
- Direct from authors and librarians (following IRB and other ethical data practices)



Powell, R.R. and Connaway, L.S. (2004). *Basic research methods for librarians*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Who else cares about this data?

- **Library colleagues** at similar institutions or other institutions, geographically close or far, etc. Think narrow and broad.
- **Federal agencies, researchers, academic disciplines, funders, etc.** focused on similar topics (e.g., student success, research productivity).
- Who are **authorities** in the field?
- What **terms** might they use?
- What **databases** might contain this content (i.e., look beyond library literature)?
- What **issues/concepts** or sub-issues/concepts are relevant?

Brainstorm
keywords

Keywords

Use thesauri to
identify appropriate
controlled
vocabulary

Thesaurus

Link terms using
Boolean
operations,
truncation, etc.

Link

Consider database
limiters or other
search features

Features

Complete a few
quick searches

Try

Scan records
retrieved; look for
better subject
headings or
descriptions;
consider viability of
selected database as
needed

Try again

Find an on-topic
record; mine it for
search terms,
citations, likely
authors or journals,
etc.; leverage any
citation tracing
database
functionality

Look for a gem

When Existing Research May Not Be Helpful

- Library research is often **not generalizable** due to focus on specific contexts.
- Library research is often **limited** in terms of data reach (focused only on libraries and not the full user experience).
- Library research is often **episodic** or one-off rather than longitudinal, coherent, or building off others' work.
- Library research is often **not disseminated** widely; therefore it is not easily discoverable.
- Library research **may not be representative** in its samples; therefore it may (advertently or inadvertently) codify practices or perpetuate beliefs that are inaccurate and harmful.
- Library research tends to be **short on theory** as a grounding and therefore over rely on assumptions that may be faulty.
- Library research tends to over rely on **limited approaches** (e.g., surveys).

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Thinking Through Gathering New Data

- What are the **concepts, problem areas, or variables** you need to gather data about?
- Does the data arise naturally out of the situation being studied? If not, how will you **locate the data**?
- How do you plan to **gather the data** (e.g., survey, interview, focus group, observation)? Is **more than one method** of data gathering needed?
- Are special processes, equipment, technology, or knowledge required for gathering the data? If so, do you have access to those resources?



Symonds and Leedy & Ormrod in Powell, R.R. and Connaway, L.S. (2004). *Basic research methods for librarians*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Thinking Through Gathering New Data

- Do you have **sufficient access to participants** to ensure a **representative and/or meaningful sample** for data gathering?
- What are the **costs** in gathering the data (e.g., time, money, social capital, intellectual/emotional labor of or risk to participants)?
- How certain are you that this data will **accurately reflect** the areas you plan to study and understand? Are they directly related?
- How certain are you that this data will be **actionable** in ways that are **beneficial to the participant community**?



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