

Libraries, Librarians, and Change: Survey Responses

The survey Libraries, Librarians, and Change was posted online using SurveyMonkey.com in April 2006. The purpose of the survey was to receive firsthand impressions, experiences, and opinions regarding change and libraries. The survey had the following preface:

Thank you for taking the time to answer this short survey about libraries, librarians, and change. We are interested in knowing how change affects services, procedures, and other operations within your library.

By participating, you are giving your permission to be quoted in a forthcoming book from Information Today, as well as in supporting materials on the topic (e.g. articles, promotional materials, blogs, presentations). Please be sure to indicate whether you would like to remain anonymous. If you wish to remain anonymous, identifying details about you and your institution will be deleted from quoted answers. If you do not wish to answer a particular question, please leave it blank.

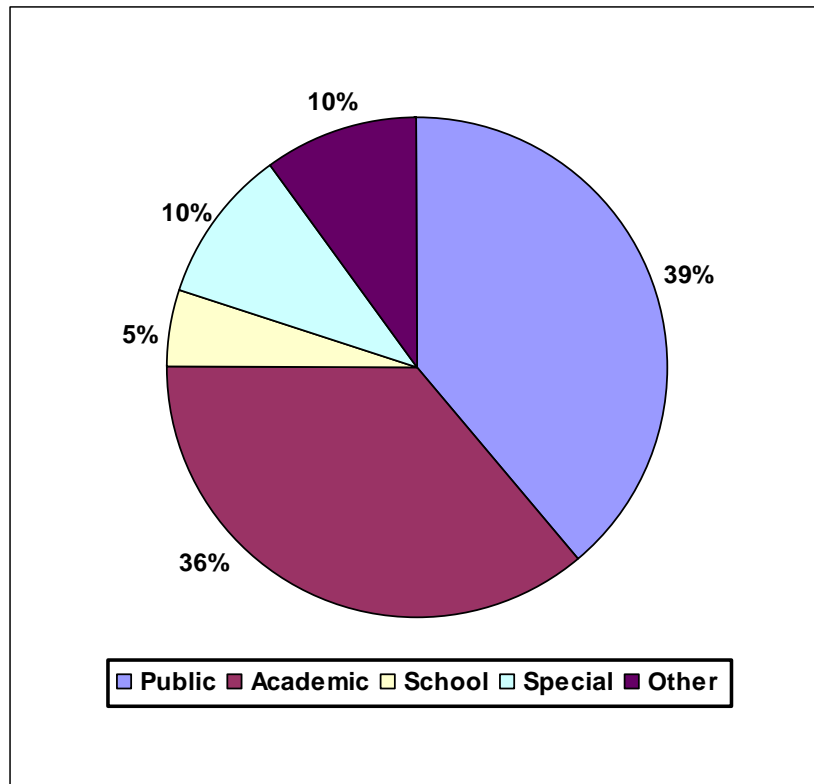
Survey Questions

1. Name
2. Email address
3. If your answers are quoted, do you wish to remain anonymous? Yes / No
4. Which best describes your library? Public / Academic / School / Special / Other (please specify)
5. Which best describes your current job? Administration / Management / Librarian / Support Staff / Other (please specify)
6. Position/Title
7. Organization
8. City
9. State
10. ZIP
11. Do you have an MLS/MSLIS? Yes / No / I'm a library science student
12. If yes, what year and where did you receive your degree?
13. What year did you begin working in libraries?
14. Do you feel that, overall, your library changes... Too much / Just the right amount / Not enough / Other (please specify)
15. What stimulates change in your library? Check all that apply. Administrative decisions / Committees or teams / User feedback, surveys or focus groups / Staff feedback, surveys or focus groups / Other (please specify)
16. How frequently are staff involved in providing input or making decisions that affect services, procedures, and other operations within your library? Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never
17. Please elaborate if desired
18. What role do you think staff should play in creating and implementing library services?
19. In your organization, what can staff do to get a library service, procedure or policy changed?
20. Does your library have regularly scheduled evaluations of services, procedures, and policies? Yes / No / Somewhere in between – Please elaborate
21. Do you think that your library consistently offers the services that library users want? Yes / No / Sometimes
22. Please elaborate if desired
23. What do you think libraries need to do to keep up with the changing needs of library users?
24. What do you think libraries can do to reach new users?
25. We welcome any additional comments about libraries, librarians, and change.

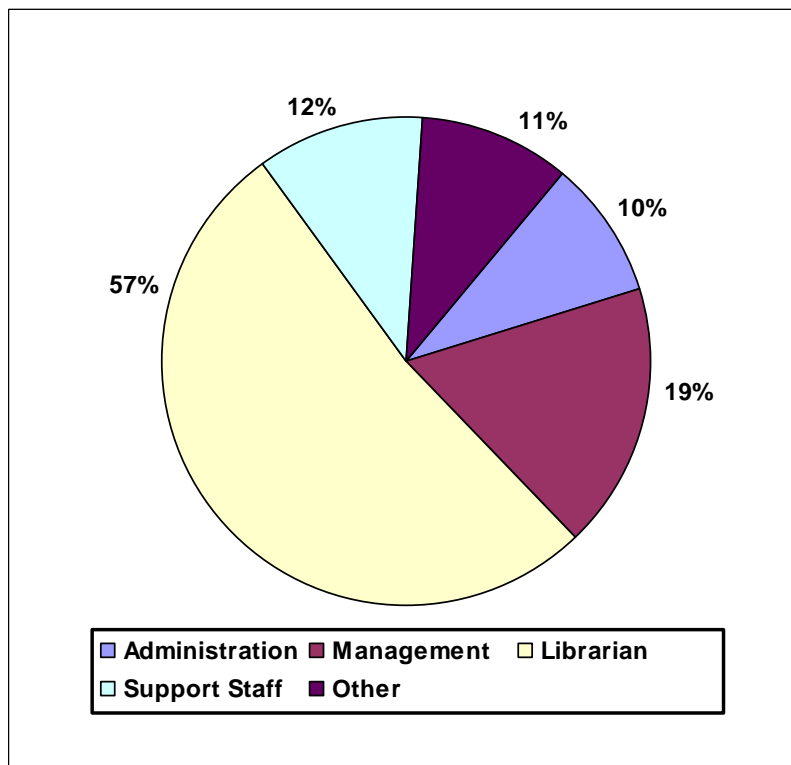
Select Responses

A total of 365 people completed the survey. Respondents included librarians, support staff, managers, administrators, library science students, and library service vendors. Below are select statistics and responses.

Which best describes your library?

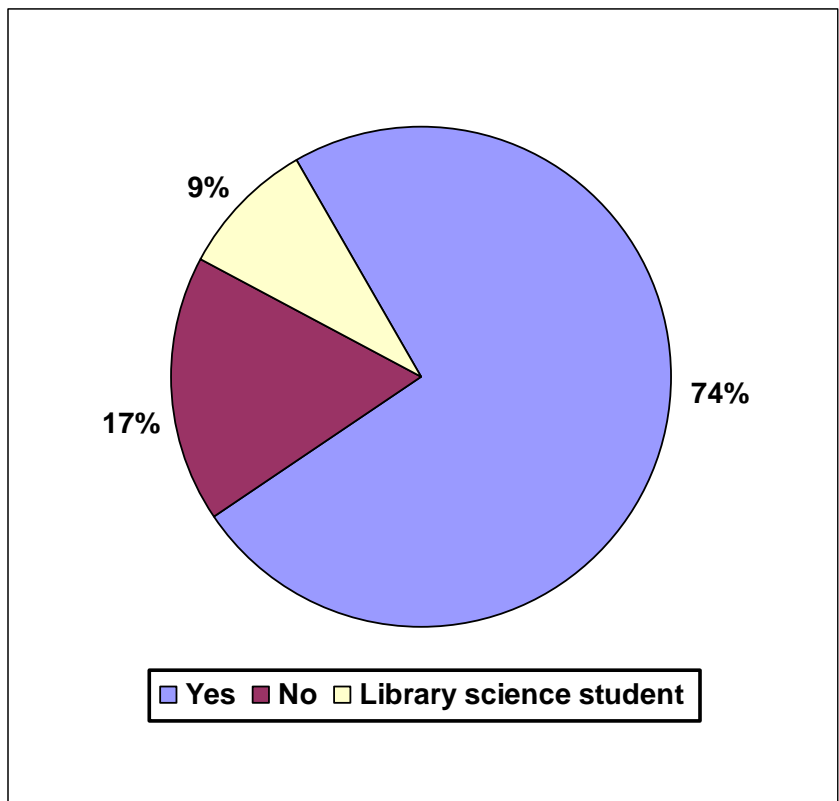


Which best describes your current job?*

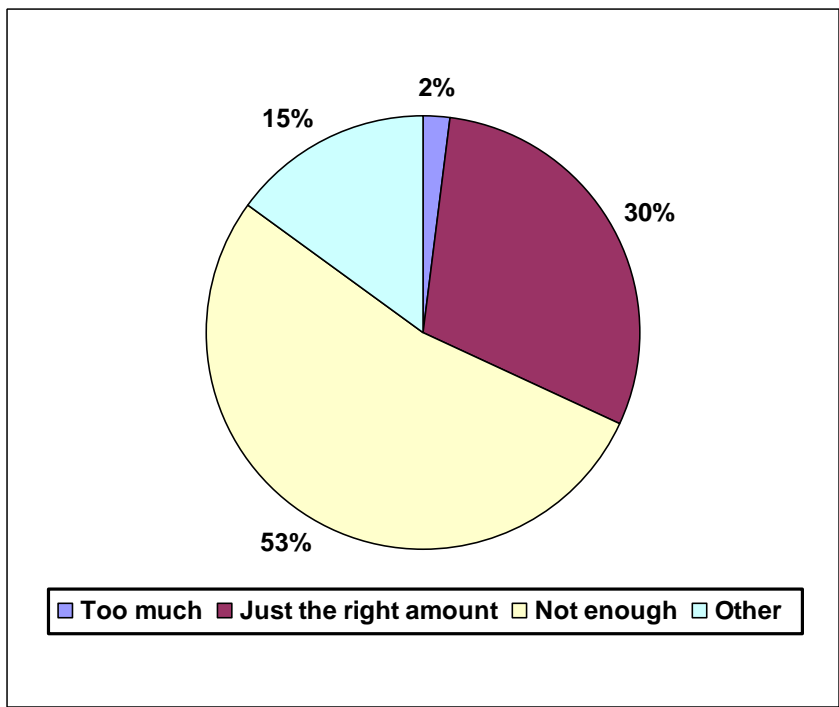


**10% of survey respondents selected more than one answer*

Do you have an MLS/MSLIS?



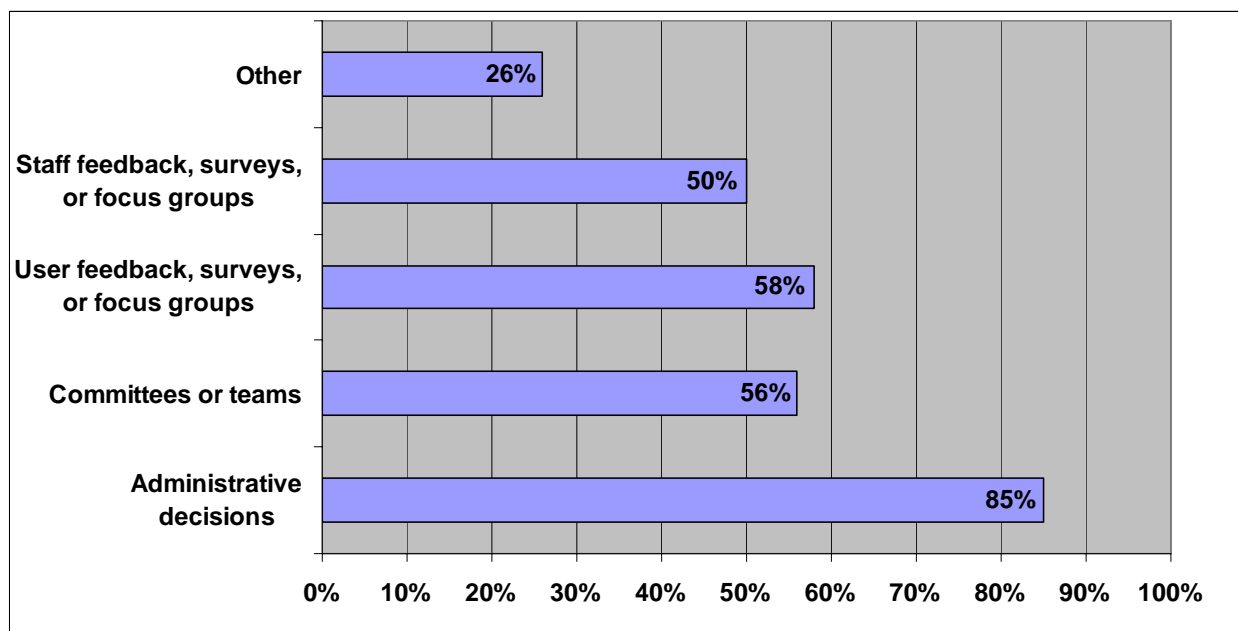
Do you feel that, overall, your library changes...



- "It depends; in some areas, it changes too much, and in some, change is very slow in coming."

- “We are behind in some areas, ahead in others. What bothers me is that sometimes we make changes "because everyone else is doing it" instead of carefully considering whether the changes make sense for our students and faculty.”
- “Not fast enough in some ways, too fast in others. We are crippled by bureaucracy sometimes.”
- “I would say between "too much" and "just the right amount" as it is hard to keep current with all the changes. Not that I don't like change but it is hard to keep up sometimes.”
- “Depends on the area. Some areas (e.g., Computer Services) seem to change a good amount in response to changes in technology. Other areas are extremely resistant to change.”
- “We're pretty flexible overall. I can think of three 'sacred cows' that have been put to pasture in the past year. We're all easy going, which helps, and realize that we have to evolve with our community.”
- “The scheduling of change is often haphazard and reactive, instead of well thought out and proactive.”

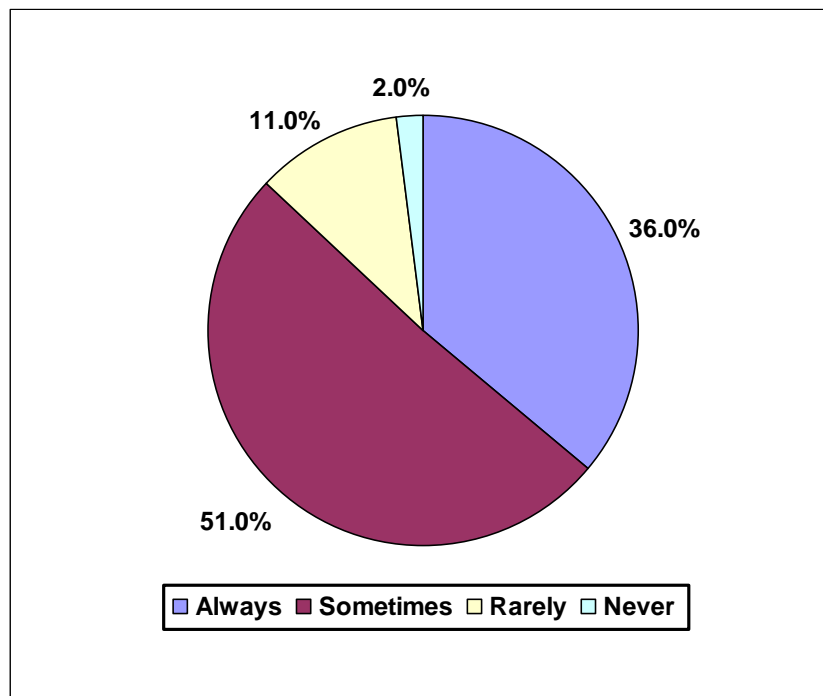
What stimulates change in your library? Check all that apply.



- “Mostly conversations among staff ... based on our observations [and] interactions with patrons.”
- “Usually it’s a result of outside forces [and] necessity [and] to a lesser extent, suggestions from administration or other staff.”
- “Parents supply our budget and may choose to fund – or not fund – projects which we propose.”
- “When forced to. For example, Wal-Mart drops VHS, resulting in fewer VHS being produced, which means librar[ies] can’t get the VHS it would normally buy, thus forcing a change to DVD.”

- “[B]ad publicity (i.e. reacting to negative news comparing the library with other local libraries implementing change.”
- “Information from conferences and meetings, whether attended in person, or reading conference blogs.”
- “Individuals who make suggestions and have the persistence to see them through”
- “Sometimes, the input of a single patron can have a huge impact, which doesn't seem quite right...”
- “Creative staff learn about new methods or technology from reading, networking or attending conferences and lobby for change. Sometimes it is the administrators who instigate the change either by funding projects or cutting the budget.”
- “Elections, budget processes and media.”

How frequently are staff involved in providing input or making decisions that affect services, procedures, and other operations within your library?



What role do you think staff should play in creating and implementing library services?

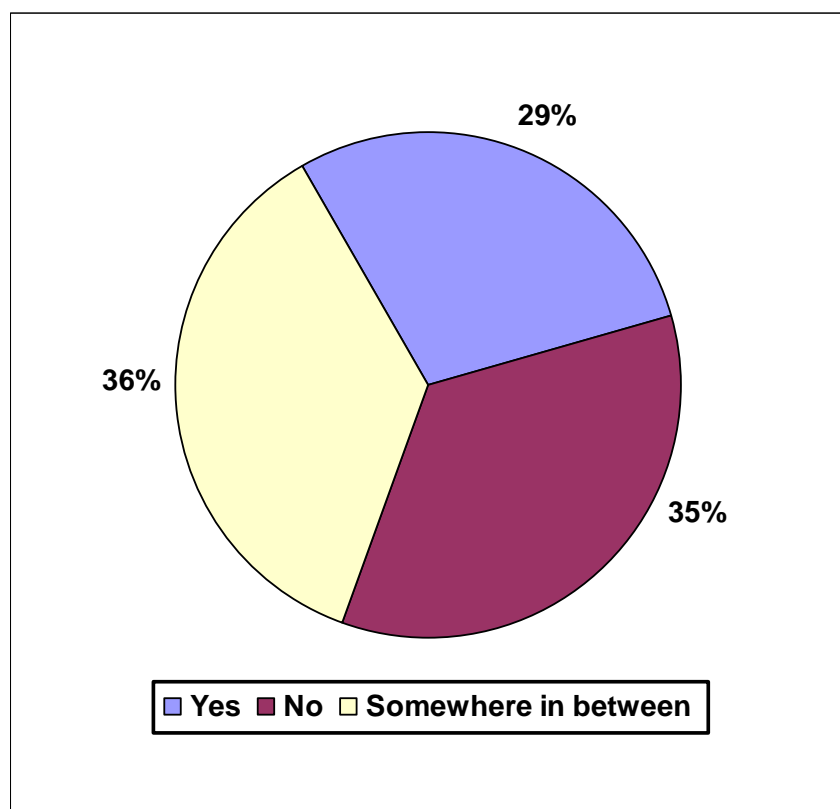
- “Staff should have an active role; they are often the ones out there on the frontlines and have to be the ones to implement them. At the same time, staff can’t always have a say in every single thing that affects their job. Libraries can be giant bureaucracies as it is; at some point a decision needs to be made. I also think staff are a valuable resource for creating new services. It’s also important that there be a culture where staff are encouraged to make suggestions, and those suggestions are taken seriously. Nothing is more frustrating than hearing ‘we want your ideas,’ only to never see new ideas implemented.”

- “I think they should be instrumental in helping with changes to services and functions. They are on the front lines working with people all the time, so they have a good sense of what they need and want.”
- “I think staff should always have input. If staff can provide and supply a new concept, it should be considered. Not every idea flies, but they should be addressed.”
- “Staff should play a HUGE role, but they need to take responsibility for learning what’s going on, and acquaint themselves with user needs and expectations, rather than basing decisions on long-held beliefs or models of services that may be outdated”.
- “The people who provide a service or perform a task should be involved in the ‘change process’ when their service or task is impacted. The trouble is, usually these staff have no sense of ownership of their job because they’ve been browbeaten or bullied for so long.”
- “Staff should be involved – they can have insights into how things are actually functioning in implementation, what practical things need to be taken into consideration. Plus, programs ‘imposed from on high’ tend to die a painful death if the staff doesn’t feel connected to them.”
- “That’s very hard to answer since every library is so different. Staff should contribute according to their abilities and expertise. [E]veryone should be able to make suggestions outside of his or her specialty.”

In your organization, what can staff do to get a library service, procedure or policy changed?

- “I’ve found suggesting the change to the relevant supervisor or manager to be most effective, so long as that supervisor or manager is open to the idea of doing things differently [or] better.”
- “Sometimes simply making a suggestion will do it; sometimes months of gentle, repeated suggesting (read ‘hectoring’ or ‘nagging’) is necessary.”
- “The only path is to approach the director.”
- “Staff are encouraged to first speak to their direct supervisors (or the person in charge of the area they’d like to see changed). Our administrative team of directors is all open to hearing suggestions also, if someone wants to go that route. It also helps an idea get a listen if you have constructive suggestions for changes, not just complaints about something needing to be changed.”
- “I would have to speak to my supervisor, other persons with seniority, and then try to get our library ‘opinion leaders’ (who aren’t always savvy) on board with the concept.”
- “Pretty much just bring it up. The managers will kick it around, we might open it up to staff feedback, discuss it in a staff meeting, and then make it happen.”
- “Talking to your supervisor is the best way to advocate for change. Participating in working groups is another established route. There’s also a suggestion box for anonymous feedback.”
- “The most effective method is to work through one of our many committees, task forces, or project teams. A staff member can also work with a supervisor to initiate change.”

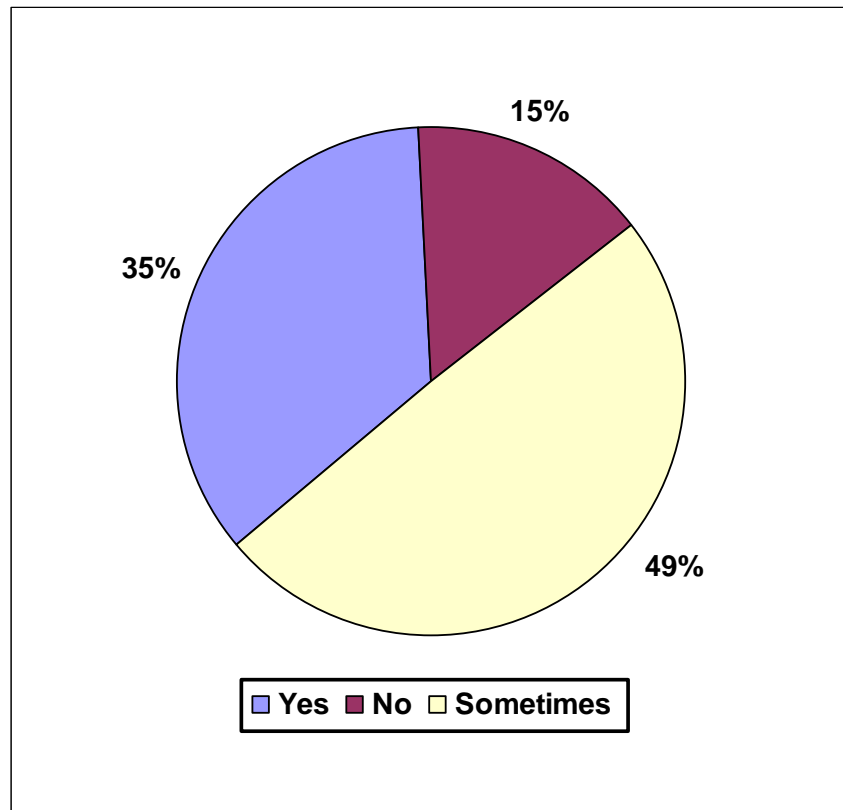
Does your library have regularly scheduled evaluations of services, procedures, and policies?



- “Some units tend to review policies and procedures on a fairly frequent basis. The library does engage in periodic strategic planning as well, but many services and policies are reviewed only as needed.”
- “We re-evaluate when we prepare for accreditation, and on an ad hoc basis, but the latter case is more reactive than proactive.”
- “An information audit is conducted very irregularly (8 yrs between the two I’ve experienced).”
- “Regular, but only of some services & policies, not all.”
- “We are subject to accreditation reviews on a regular basis, and these include services, procedures and policies to some degree--probably every 5 years.”
- “We do our own surveys but there is no policy in place to self regulate anything that I am aware of.”
- “We’ve been doing LibQual every two years, for 2 iterations now.”
- “In the past year we made a commitment in strategic planning to conduct more formal evaluations, including service measures and priorities, as well as policies.”
- “[W]e do have annual "tracking" and goal setting which allows for new service directions and policies to form, but there are some current procedures that need reevaluation. [R]ather than

take the time to do just that, the emphasis is on new ideas, instead of fixing what worked then to make it work now.”

Do you think that your library consistently offers the services that library users want?



What do you think libraries need to do to keep up with the changing needs of library users?

- “Provide the staff with a voice to promote needed changes and be able to have the opportunity to explain to those in charge why these changes are needed and who they’re for – the patrons! We’re the ones who work with the library users on a daily basis, and we’re the ones who have the best ‘feel’ for what their needs are.”
- “Try to keep an eye on not only what services people are using, and what services people are asking for, but also on what services people are going elsewhere to get. For example: Are people spending more time at the bookstore than the library? What does the bookstore have that the library doesn’t? (Hours? Locations? Comfortable seating? Etc.)”
- “Consistently solicit and LISTEN to feedback.”
- “Understand our customers and their changing needs. Talking to our users, reading about how the coming generations are changing their information seeking behaviors and use of technology.”
- “We should be ready and willing to see the change, create the change, and be the change.”
- “Keep a close eye on demographics, what and how successful businesses in the area are marketing, and pay attention to, even solicit, frontline staff opinions and ideas.”

- “Outreach, especially to people who don’t use the library. Look beyond books to fill our library.”

What do you think libraries can do to reach new users?

- “Try new outreach methods. Do more on the Web. Get Flickr accounts, use blogs, try MySpace. Do anything that might work and hasn’t been tried before or recently.”
- “Look at the needs and interests of some of the people who aren’t showing up (e.g., the skateboarders in the parking lot). Find a way to meet some of those needs and interests (skateboarding books, Web links, music popular with local skateboarding subculture, maybe a speaker). And, let the potential users know about what’s available. As a middle school library, we usually use the morning announcements, posters, or tracking down a kid from the group and showing the kid what we’ve got.”
- “In our situations, we can make a personal effort to make a connection. We can also use their peers and faculty to reach out to them about the value of the library in their education.”
- “Marketing, advertising. Let underserved groups know how the library can be useful. Tell patrons to tell their friends that their research questions were answered at the library.”
- “Create a more engaging presence that offers something users see as unique and innovative.”
- “Podcasts, RSS, roadshows, e-mail. Tailor service to the different stakeholder groups – international researchers in science don’t want the same things as first-year undergraduates in English, but we tend to offer a one-size-fits-all service.”
- “I think technology has some ways that we might reach new users who would traditionally avoid the library. We need to reach out to them in a space where they feel comfortable rather than expect them to be dazzled by our brilliance and come into our physical building. Things like podcasts, blogs, Flickr, tags might be ways we could reach some new users.”
- “Be personable, approachable, and useful.”
- “Multiple things: Reach out with new technologies; have staff who reflect the population served; offer services in more languages than just English and Spanish; be more visible in the community.”

We welcome any additional comments about libraries, librarians, and change.

- “Change for the sake of having a change is not good enough. There needs to be a direction, target, or goal. The change needs to be measurable and objective”
- “Embracing change can be scary. But once a library starts to change and decides to see change as a constant state, then it becomes easier and easier.”
- “We need to collaborate more and teach each other.”
- “If you don't change with the changing needs of your public, you become irrelevant.”
- “This is an exciting time to be a librarian.”