Regional Medical Library-Sponsored e-Science Activities: A Qualitative Survey and Lessons Learned

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Regional Medical Library-sponsored e-Science activities: A qualitative survey and lessons learned

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OBJECTIVE

To determine, by National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) region:

- the extent of participation in Regional Medical Library (RML) sponsored activities addressing e-science;
- the structure of those activities, and;
- the effect, if any, they have had within their region.

The project was limited to activities occurring during the current 2011-2016 NN/LM contract period.

BACKGROUND

What prompted my interest?

- I have been the Project Coordinator for the University of Massachusetts and New England Area Librarian E-Science Initiative (E-Sci ence), supported by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) since 2009.
- I was the Project Chair for E-Science Day (December 2011), sponsored by the Pacific Southwest Region.
- I am the Managing Editor for the Journal of e-Science Libraries.
- I participated in an e-science planning group that involved the Southeastern Atlantic Region in April 2011.

METHODS

- The same introductory letter and qualitative survey was emailed to each RML Associate Director.
- The survey began with a definition of e-science[1] in an attempt to establish a framework of what was meant by the term "e-science.
- The survey:
  - offered multiple-choice and SE/Sci choices to the blank questions addressing:
    - Which region is being represented?
    - What kind of e-science related activities the RML had sponsored?
    - Which, if any, of the activities included Continuing Education credits from the Medical Library Association?
    - If the RML intended to sponsor e-science related activities during the remainder of the current NN/LM contract?
    - If the Associate Director was aware of the activities impacting the regional members?
    - If the RML claimed the activities to be successful?
    - If any of the other permission from the Associate Director to contact them for a follow-up question if further clarification was needed.

Follow-up conversations were held with 5 of the Associate Directors via telephone, email, and in-person conversation. These Associate Directors were selected for follow-up because they included contextual information in the surveys that was critical to understanding their survey responses and regional activity (see "Lessons Learned").

RESULTS

- 100% of surveys were completed.
- All regions indicated activity pertaining to e-science, the form that this took, however, varied greatly (Table 1);
- Each region indicated that they had sponsored e-science related activities in the future (Table 2); Again, the form of this varied greatly. Additionally, these results reflect that the survey was administered only 18 months into the current NN/LM contract period (see "Lessons Learned").

Table 1: e-Science related activity, broken down by form of activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Day Workshops/Symposiums</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Day Workshops/Symposiums</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars/Conferences</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual/Online</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Table of future planned e-science related activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convene a group to form a continuation education subcommittee for the region.</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an e-Science and data management subcommittee for the region.</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation of an e-Science/Clinical Librarian to aid in the creation of an e-Science library of medicine.</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education opportunities include: an e-Science bootcamp, annual professional development days, publishing the Journal of e-Science Libraries, and continuing the e-Science Portal.</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LESSONS LEARNED

Very valuable lessons were learned during the course of this project, which ultimately broke down into two categories:

ABOUT THE RMLs

- The RMLs are not necessarily "top-down" organizations, the direction of such is led strongly by the interests and needs of the network members;
- Each RML has its own culture and because of this, it is difficult to fairly compare them;
- Some RMLs have been in place for multiple contract periods, others are either new or relatively new and are still working out their regional plans;
- The regions do not "exist in a vacuum," i.e. they do not necessarily operate independently of one another.

- E.g., a few regions acknowledged the work done by the New England Region on the e-Science Portal and decided that since it satisfied the educational needs of other regions, they would not need to create a similar resource.

ABOUT DOING RESEARCH

- Defining "e-science" is difficult. Although I provided a frequently cited definition, there does not seem to be a standard definition of e-science, thus the survey questions may be interpreted differently among Associate Directors.
- E.g., one RML included CTSB activities, while another did not.

- It would have been a good idea to contact each Associate Director before this project, to receive feedback on it to gauge their interest in participating.

- Since the survey was administered only 18 months into the current NN/LM contract period, it could be concluded prematurely as there are 48 months left in the contract. The question regarding whether the RMLs plan to sponsor activities in the future was critical in that it highlighted that RML planning and activities are still in development.

- It can certainly enlighten you to your project.

- E.g., I did not read over the NN/LM REP Statement of Work before designing the survey. Given my lack of knowledge of the e-science outreach objectives to the REP and my own experience with the RMLs and e-science, I assumed "e-science support" would take the form of educational activities. This bias was reflected in my survey questions. The REP notes that the RML shelf will "develop pilot projects, which may include professional networks and organizations, to identify and promote the roles of libraries in institutions that house a science initiative."[2] This is a broad enough directive that the results from this project illustrate that each RML has so far participated in e-science support activities, regardless of whether or not this takes the form as an educational activity.

CONCLUSIONS

As this project has illustrated, e-science, while a nebulous concept and rather difficult to identify with one definition, is being discussed and supported for medical librarians. Their librarians due in part to the national reach of the RMLs. In retrospect, the author has come to understand that the most interesting question is not, "What is each RML doing to address e-science?" but rather, "what form is the RML e-science outreach activity taking?" Every RML is participating in e-science outreach activities; the most important take-away for this author is that the form and structure of these activities may vary greatly from one RML to the next. Ultimately, the bottom line is, what level of activity best serves the region and its network members? As the author has learned, the RMLs are not strictly top-down organizations, and as such, their activities will strongly reflect the interests of their regional membership.

REFERENCES


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