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

Raquel Abad
University of California - Davis

Follow this and additional works at: https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/escience_symposium

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License.

Repository Citation

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License. This material is brought to you by eScholarship@UMMS. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Massachusetts and New England Area Librarian e-Science Symposium by an authorized administrator of eScholarship@UMMS. For more information, please contact Lisa.Palmer@umassmed.edu.
Regional Medical Library-sponsored e-Science activities: A qualitative survey and lessons learned

Raquel Abad, MLIS, Health Sciences Librarian
Blaisdell Medical Library; University of California, Davis; Sacramento, CA; 95819

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 extent, 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 piqued my interest:
I have been the Project Coordinator for the University of Massachusetts and New England Area Librarian X-Science Symposium since 2009, co-sponsored by the New England Region;
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 the Medical Library Association: JMLA since 2009, co-editing the biannual e-science issue;
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:
• 7 multiple-choice and fill in the blank questions addressing:
  1. What kind of e-science related activities the RML had sponsored;
  2. Which region is being represented;
  3. What kind of e-science related activities the RML had sponsored;
  4. Of, if any, the activities included Continuing Education credits from the Medical Library Association;
  5. If the RML intended to sponsor e-science related activities during the remainder of the current NN/LM contract;
  6. If the Associate Director was aware of the activities impacting the regional members;
  7. If the RML, has in its own culture and because of this, is different to fairly compare them;
• The regions do not "exist in a vacuum," i.e. they do not necessarily operate independently of one another.
• For example, 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.

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 intended to sponsor 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>MLA</th>
<th>NER</th>
<th>MCR</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>PNR</th>
<th>GMR</th>
<th>SE/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Day Workshop/Symposium</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Day Workshop/Symposium</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Breakdown of future-planned e-Science related activity.

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, so the survey questions may be interpreted differently among Associate Directors;
  - E.g., one RML included CTA activities, while another did not.
• It would have been a good idea to contact each Associate Director before doing this project, to receive feedback on its design and ensure the interest in participation;
• Since the survey was administered only 18 months into the current NN/LM contract period, it could be considered premature 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;
• Be very cognizant of bias! It can unintentionally show up in 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 in the RFP 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 RFP states that the RML shall "develop pilot projects, which may include professional networks and organizations, to identify and promote the roles of libraries in institutions that have an e-science initiative." 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 and their libraries 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 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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I would like to thank Roma Barger, Cathy Burschlog, Alan Czok, Claire Hansen, Ruth Hole, Donna Karl, Michelle Malizia, Mary Porter, and Dale Prince for their willingness to participate in my project through their completion of the survey, insightful feedback and comments, and generous follow-up discussions.