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Mary E. Piorun
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Et al.

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The Outreach Continuum: Expanding the Medical Librarian’s Role
Mary E. Piorun, MLS, MBA, AHIP; Jane Fama, MLS, AHIP; Elaine R. Martin, DA; Nancy LaPelle, PhD
Lamar Soutter Library ✦ University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA

Project Overview
- With the implementation of a single service point, librarians have more time to engage in outreach. However, what does management mean by outreach? What skills are needed to conduct outreach?
- Focus groups were conducted with librarians to gain an understanding of the work currently perceived as outreach. Findings were used to inform a definition of outreach and to develop a continuum of outreach activities requiring increasing skill levels.
- Librarians tracked their outreach activities, mapping them to the continuum for three months. It became clear where activities fell and where to concentrate future efforts.
- The continuum and tracking logs served as a data source for strategic planning and assisted staff with individual goal setting.
- Tracking and categorizing outreach activities raises awareness of the types of outreach activities and identifies areas for skill development.
- In the future, tracking logs will be streamlined and automated; the continuum remains a useful tool for discussion and planning.

Outreach Continuum

Our Definition of Outreach
Embed the library within the institution it supports by engaging, building relationships, and partnering with (potential) client group(s) beyond the initial interaction or their immediate need. The purpose is to understand client work processes and information-related needs in order to suggest and provide ongoing services to enhance their ability to get desired results from their research, education, or clinical-related work.

BASIC
- Promote library services and capabilities via website, email, etc.
- Follow-up to general reference question or literature search to explore other client-related work needs.
- Follow-up to expert technical assistance or training provided to explore other client-related work needs (for acquisitions, services, etc.)

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- Attend client events open to all, develop contacts, and follow up to explore client-related work needs.
- Pro-actively invite faculty to present at library-sponsored events to learn what is important to faculty.
- Receive invitation to closed client event or committee to represent the library/train/present; identifying contacts for future partnerships.
- Pro-actively obtain an invitation to train/present/act as resource at a closed client event, identifying contacts for future partnerships.

PARTNERING
- Become a virtual member of (embedded in) a closed client group as liaison or business partner who can identify client group needs for library services.
- Invited to assist on a collaborative project by a client.
- Propose collaborative project with clients where library staff plays a key role as content expert

Sample Outreach Log for Long-term Projects
- Task: Manage and offer informational or marketing-type talks locally.
- Target Audience: Local community.
- Initial Contacts/References: Existing local partnerships, community or social service organizations.
- Duration: Ongoing.

Sample Outreach Log for Short-term Projects
- Task: Ensure library presence at key events.
- Initial Contacts/References: Existing local partnerships, community or social service organizations.
- Duration: Short-term.