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

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The Survey:

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

And if the author had permission from the Associate Director to contact them with follow-up questions if further clarification was needed.

If the Associate Director was aware of the activities impacting the regional members;

Which, if any, of the activities included Continuing Education credits from the Medical Library Association;

To what extent of participation in Regional Medical Library (RML) sponsored activities did the RMLs plan to sponsor activities in the future?

Table 1: Breakdown of future-planned e-science-related activity.

Table 2: e-Science related activity, broken down by form of activity.

*Continuing education opportunities include: an e-Science forum, a 2-day data management course, webinars, annual e-Science symposia, annual science boodcamps, annual professional development days, publishing the Journal of eScience Librarianship, and continuing the e-Science Portal.

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”).

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 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 the survey questions and have them provide a pilot version of the survey.

- 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.

- Be very cognizant of bias. It cannot unintentionally show up in your project.

- E.g., I did not read over the NN/LM EBP Statement of Work before designing the survey. Given my lack of knowledge of the e-science outreach objectives in the RML and my own experience with the RML 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 RMLs shall develop pilot projects, which may include professional networks and organizations, to identify and promote the roles of libraries in institutions that have e-science initiatives[7]. 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 initiatives are inherently region and rather difficult to identify with one definition, is being discussed and supported for medical librarians and their libraries due to the rapid growth of the RMLs. In contrast, 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 does the RML’s e-science outreach activity take?” Every RML 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 kind of activity best serves the region and its network members?

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