



Library Information Needs Assessment

Background

In an effort to enhance library services, the EPA National Library Network contracted with Outsell, Inc., an information industry consultant, to execute an agencywide needs assessment. The objective of this project was to determine the future information needs of an increasingly mobile work force, and to learn how to leverage technology to serve EPA library users.

Key Findings

- The results of the survey revealed that opinions of EPA libraries and information usage varied greatly among respondents at various EPA facilities. The survey yielded much insight about information use habits of EPA employees.
- Respondents agreed that EPA libraries save time in finding information, provide easy access to library services, help them get work done more efficiently, provide access to the most current information available, and provide services they would recommend to others.
- Respondents expressed confidence in information from EPA libraries and reported positive impressions of electronic library resources available.
- The most often used items were EPA publications or reports, agency policies and guidance, electronic journals, and scientific and technical information.
- Respondents identified several obstacles for EPA's libraries. The most common issues cited were the lack of funding for EPA library services, lack of full-text electronic resources, the need for a citation database such as Web of Science, not knowing what information is available, lack of remote access to library resources, and inconsistent or reduced library hours.
- Some respondents still use physical libraries. Half of respondents from ORD Laboratories, RTP, and Cincinnati reported using an EPA library at least weekly. Respondents from Headquarters and Regions were most likely to have not used the library in the past 12 months.
- Respondents used resources other than EPA libraries to find information, including Internet search engines, EPA's Internet and Intranet sites, profession-specific online portals and resources, colleagues or experts within EPA, personal collections, and external library services.
- A common request was the need for more library training. Respondents were interested in computer training modules, training on demand, one-on-one training, online tutorials; and tailored programs

Recommendations

- 1. Provide a broader selection of electronic journals via the Desktop Library.** Explore alternate journal subscription providers to expand the collection of journal titles and consider promoting partnerships with university libraries, government agencies, or associations to gain access to additional journals and resources.
- 2. Enhance search capabilities on EPA websites.** Information seekers routinely choose Google over EPA search engines because they experience greater success, even when searching for internal EPA documents.
- 3. Conduct a portfolio management study and optimize Desktop Library resources.** There are resources that are purchased and offered at single sites that have the potential to be universally beneficial; offering them centrally via the Desktop Library could yield economies of scale and provide access to necessary resources.
- 4. Market, promote, and raise awareness of library offerings.** Due to inconsistencies and variances in services and resources, users do not know where to turn, how to access resources and services, what is available, or how to make requests.
- 5. Offer more training on how to use the library resources and services.** Training must be specific, targeted, and customized to individuals or small groups.
- 6. Provide remote access for offsite workers.** Mobile Internet access to internal EPA sites for increasingly mobile workers would keep them connected and productive.
- 7. Offer expanded and consistent operating hours that are clearly posted.** Library operating hours have been reduced and vary by location. Information seekers do not always know when they have access to a librarian.
- 8. Provide information sharing and collaboration tools.** Enabling exchange and collaboration among employees will lead to innovation, efficiencies, productivity, and fewer redundant efforts.
- 9. Improve turnaround times for interlibrary loan, especially books.** Journal articles usually arrive quickly, but books often take far longer (use e-books as a resource).
- 10. Complete feedback loops regarding research findings and resulting actions.** Whenever research is conducted among an organization's patrons, it is important to close the loop by reporting back to them.

Methodology

Outsell held interviews with library staff, after which a quantitative survey was developed and provided to all EPA employees. There were 2,377 survey responses, a 14% response rate. Next were qualitative interviews with stakeholders or executive-level management. Key areas discussed in these interviews included information behaviors, preferences and ideal information landscapes. The final step was qualitative focus groups, which were formed among key user segments of EPA staff.