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Using Question Walls for User Feedback

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PURPOSE

Gather feedback from users to assess different aspects of library services and cook up changes! This recipe is a favorite among library staff members in access services and assessment roles. (*Editor's note: Chapter 26 features a similar, yet less complex, approach that you may wish to explore if time and resources are a concern.*)

TARGET AUDIENCE

All patrons

INGREDIENTS

- Moveable whiteboard
- Post-it Notes.
- Decorations to engage users (may be changed with each question)

- Printed questions
- Pencils for user feedback
- Spreadsheet application (e.g., Google Sheets) for data collection and organization
- Staff time:
 - ◇ ~2 hours per week (prep)
 - ◇ ~2 hours per week data collection, organization, and dissemination

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Gather library staff to whip up questions to ask users. For example, "Where do you see the library in 5 years?"
2. Create a schedule based on the best time of year to ask each question. For example, questions about finals week snacks might be asked two to three weeks prior to finals.
3. Input the question schedule into a spreadsheet to collect and maintain data.
4. Print and post questions on a whiteboard along with blank Post-it Notes for responses and decorations to engage users (see figures 27.1, 27.2, and 27.3).
5. Move the whiteboard to a high-traffic area in the library and let simmer for one week, leaving longer if it's a slower time of the semester. You may also move the whiteboard throughout the week to different areas of the library to increase exposure to all library users.
6. Sample responses throughout the week to ensure defamatory or inappropriate responses have not been posted; evaluate and take down if needed.



Figure 27.1. An example of a whiteboard setup.



Figure 27.2. An example of a whiteboard setup.



Figure 27.3. An example of a whiteboard setup.

7. Not getting enough responses? Fold in library student worker responses and stir.
8. Gather data and input into the spreadsheet for analysis.
9. Evaluate data and identify immediate and long-term changes to be made.
10. Respond to patron feedback on the reverse side of the question wall. This could include a summary of the previous week's responses or a follow-up on changes the library has made based on user input (e.g., additional tables, new snack offerings during finals week, etc.).

CAUTIONS/ADVICE

There is a potential for student graffiti (e.g., tangents, distractions, inappropriate comments, etc.), especially during times of high stress. Also, in our experience, questions directly related to patrons' needs elicited more responses than "fun" questions. For example, a question about what additional items we should have at the checkout desk was far more popular than a question asking about their Halloween costume plans. Similarly, shorter questions elicited more user feedback.

Additionally, for ease of analysis, you may sort responses into categories or hashtags such as space, services, resources, etc. Use corresponding hashtags for each strategic plan goal on social media to sort and promote responses—for example, #laveryspace, #laveryaccess, #laveryasses, #laverylearn, #laveryexperts.

ASSESSMENT

Periodically, project coordinators should review questions to prevent repetition, clarify questions being asked, and ensure relevance to the library's goals. Keep track of which types of questions elicit the "best" feedback. "Best" is subjective to each library, and for us, "best" meant those questions in which we received the highest number of informative responses.

After one year with the question wall, we have made significant changes in the library based on responses, including new bean bag chairs, sound dampening strips on quiet floor doors, and new items available for checkout (e.g., colored pencils, graphing calculators, and new leisure titles).

REFLECTION

We have found the use of a question wall to be helpful in advocating for changes at the library, including additional items available for checkout, changes to seating, soundproofing, and even snacks provided during finals week. The library was also able to successfully advocate across campus departments for the addition of a single-serve coffee machine and coffee pods. One limitation of the question wall is that it only offers answers from people in the building.

REFERENCES

Clemson University Libraries. (n.d.). Cooper Wall. Retrieved from <https://libraries.clemson.edu/news/category/cooper-wall/>