IFLA Standing Section Committee on Statistics and Evaluation

Benefiting locally by taking a global perspective of library statistics, evaluation, and assessment

In 2002 I agreed to represent the Special Libraries Association (SLA) on the IFLA Standing Section Committee on Statistics and Evaluation. I am now nearing the end of my second term and have just accepted the role of Convenor of the newly formed E-Metrics Special Interest Group (SIG). The opportunity to work alongside librarians from a diverse range of countries in this specific area is a wonderful experience as it forces a global perspective of the profession and the issues that it faces which is often missing in our day-to-day decision-making and operations.

The IFLA Standing Section Committee on Statistics and Evaluation promotes the application of statistics, evaluation, and assessment in the successful management and operation of libraries and in the demonstration of the value of libraries to their users, parent institutions, and funding agencies. It focuses on the definition, standardisation, collection, analysis, interpretation, publication, and use of statistical data from all types of library and information service activity. Case studies of good practice and international benchmark comparisons are within its scope as is collaboration with international agencies such as UNESCO and ISO.

The Standing Section Committee meets twice at each annual IFLA Congress. Its 23 members represent U.S.A., U.K., Finland, Italy, France, Spain, Norway, Republic of Serbia, Sweden, Russian Federation, Canada, Germany, China, and Australia. The Committee is involved in a number of programmed sessions at each IFLA Congress and regularly collaborates with other IFLA Sections in the development of these programmes. It also co-sponsors the Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement which is held as an IFLA pre-conference satellite event each alternate year.

The Section has recently established an E-Metrics Special Interest Group which will meet for the first time in Milan in August 2009. This group will focus on the strategies and processes for the gathering, processing, and reporting of statistics and performance measures to describe the use, users, and uses of electronic and networked information services and resources.

A fundamental aspect of library management is the gathering of statistics and their application to assess and evaluate a library's performance. Taking a strategic view of measurement, assessment, and evaluation can reflect the level of resources (budget, staff, buildings, collections, technology, equipment) a library has and how they are used, the level and type of services it delivers and how well they are delivered, as well as how well it meets its clients' needs and expectations.

As we develop new services and delivery models to leverage the opportunities provided by digital information and technology, we must consider whether the statistics we collect are still relevant. For example, historically, our measurement of collection size and the usage of resources and services has been primarily quantitative, focussing on staffing (numbers, levels, etc.), budgets (staffing, collections, equipment, technology, space), collection size – physical and electronic (titles, volumes, subscriptions, linear metres, etc), the usage of physical items (loans, inhouse usage, etc.), usage of electronic services (databases, e-journals, e-books, etc.), and the usage of services (inter-library loans, reference, user instruction, etc.). It is becoming increasingly important for us to understand how well our collections and library activities meet the needs and expectations of our clients. Usage statistics do not provide data about how useful the transaction/interaction was and the value it provided to our users. Consequently, measures and the ways in which they are assessed and evaluated are becoming more qualitative in an attempt to determine impacts on our individual users and communities.

Additionally, our measurement models are often not standardised nor aligned with globally recognised measures. This limits the globally relevant data that is available about Australian libraries and our opportunities to benchmark internationally, both as individual libraries, library sectors, or as a whole. As we develop new measurement models, the IFLA Standing Section on Statistics and Evaluation advocates standardisation and alignment of statistics to facilitate the benchmarking of libraries at local, regional, national, and international levels and to provide national and international data that contributes to projects such as the Global Statistics Project, a joint project initiated by IFLA, ISO, and UNESCO Institute for Science.

There are two international standards that provide indicators for us to use to ensure consistency and comparability at local, regional, national, and international levels. These are:

1. ISO 11620 (2008) Information and documentation – Library performance indicators. 2nd edition (2008) – This standard establishes a set of performance indicators to be used by libraries of all types and guidance on how to implement the performance indicators. It provides a standardised terminology, concise definitions, and descriptions of the performance indicators.

2. ISO 2789: (2006) Information and documentation – International library statistics. 4th edition (2006) – This standard specifies rules for the library and information services community on the collection and reporting of statistics for the purposes of international reporting. It ensures conformity between countries for those statistical measures that are frequently used by library managers and aims to encourage good practice in the use of statistics for the management of library and information services.

The Global Statistics Project is a three-year collaborative program (2006 to 2009) between the IFLA Standing Section on Evaluation and Statistics, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, and ISO Committee TC46/SC8 (Information and documentation: Quality: Statistics and Performance Measurement). The project aims to produce a list of core international measures, advise on the adoption of measures facilitating the demonstration of impact and outcome, advise on appropriate measures to reflect the use of electronic information sources, advise on the use of appropriate non-library demographic and socio-economic measures, advise on the construction of appropriate indicators using the recommended statistics, and advise on additional and supplementary avenues to strengthen the collection of data.

I encourage anyone interested in library statistics, assessment, and evaluation from a global perspective to see the IFLA Section web page at **http://www.ifla.org/en/statistics-and-evaluation** and to consider participating in Committee or SIG activities. I would also encourage IFLA members to join the IFLA Section 22: Statistics and Evaluation to remain well informed about new developments and projects in statistical and assessment measures for libraries.

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