Open data in public libraries:
Gauging activities & supporting ambitions

Kaitlin Fender Throgmorton, Bree Norlander, & Carole L. Palmer

Paper Session 15:
Responsible Production and Consumption of Information

Slides available at: https://github.com/OpenDataLiteracy/ASIST2020

Disclosure

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The presenters have nothing further to disclose on this study.

Introduction

Kaitlin Throgmorton, Presenter & Co-Author
Data Curator, MLIS
Sage Bionetworks; University of Washington
Seattle, Washington, USA

Bree Norlander, Co-Author
Data Scientist, MLIS
Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington
Seattle, Washington, USA

Carole Palmer, Co-Author
Professor, Associate Dean for Research
Information School, University of Washington
Seattle, Washington, USA

About the Open Data Literacy (ODL) Project

- Led by Carole Palmer and Nic Weber
- Advance open data for public use through
  - Education
  - Research
  - Support for public librarians and information professionals in the public sector

- 2016-2020 activities:
  - Creating new curriculum
  - Providing students with open data field experience
  - Partnerships with libraries and government agencies
  - Internship projects with partners
  - Research on the state of practice

Background & Prior Work

- Libraries as infomediaries (Robinson & Mather, 2017)

- Open data as extension of libraries providing public internet and government services (Bertot, et al., 2006; Whitacre & Rhinesmith, 2015)

- Libraries in open data:
  - Add valuable expertise (Bertot, et al., 2014; Throgmorton, et al., 2019)
  - Emphasize library principles (Okamoto, 2017; Robinson & Mather, 2017; Yoon et al., 2018)
  - Mostly contribute geospatial open data (Weber & Norlander, 2019)

Purpose

- While the literature has envisioned the library role in open data and detailed use cases, limited empirical research exists on open data in public libraries.

- This survey sought to quantify current activities and future ambitions in open data for public libraries in WA state — with plans to expand to other areas.

- The survey revealed open data is a growing area for many public libraries:
  - Substantial momentum — more than expected, especially in smaller libraries
  - Limited disagreement with importance of open data
    - few libraries NOT interested in engaging

Survey Design & Methodology

- Designed in collaboration with the Washington State Library
- Distributed by the State Librarian to all systems and some branches
  - 60 system directors
  - 54 branches
- Response rate: 45%
  - Represents 5 of 15 largest systems

Responses by Reported Library Service Population

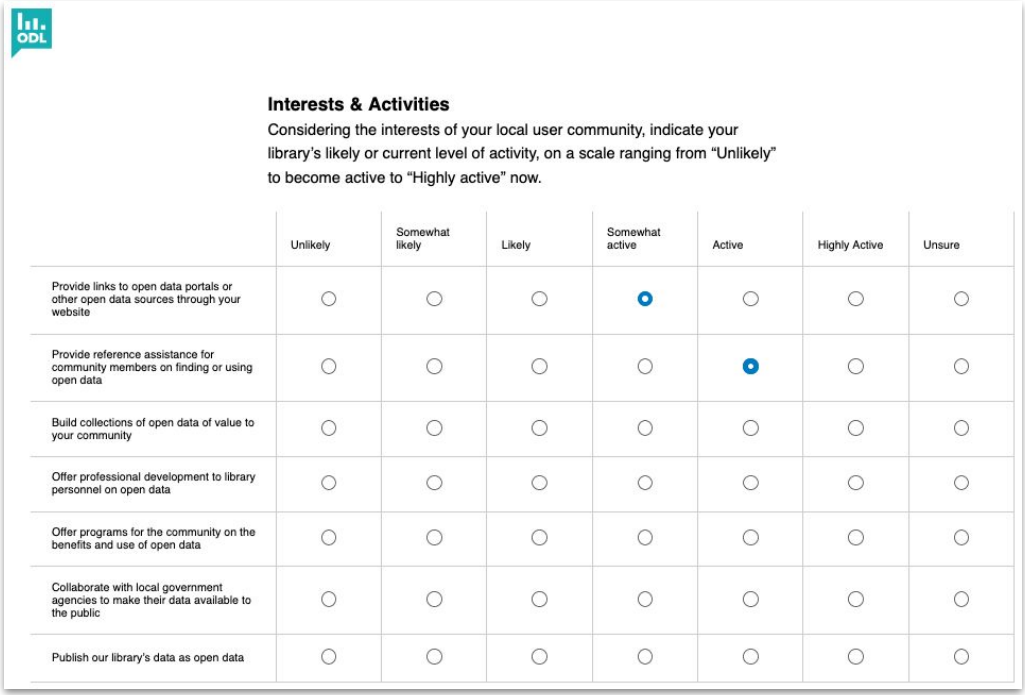
Service Population	*Respondent Count (n=51)*	*Respondent Percentage*
250,000+	16	31.4%
25,000 - 249,999	17	33.4%
Under 24,999	18	35.3%

Structure	*Respondent Count (n-=51)*	*Respondent Percentage*
System	31	68.6%
Branch	20	31.4%

Survey Design & Methodology

- Pretested by librarians with varying levels of awareness of open data

- 11 questions — 4 matrix, 6 open-ended, 1 multiple choice
  - Current context
  - Interest and activity in open data
  - Capacity and resources
  - Alignment
  - Moving forward with open data



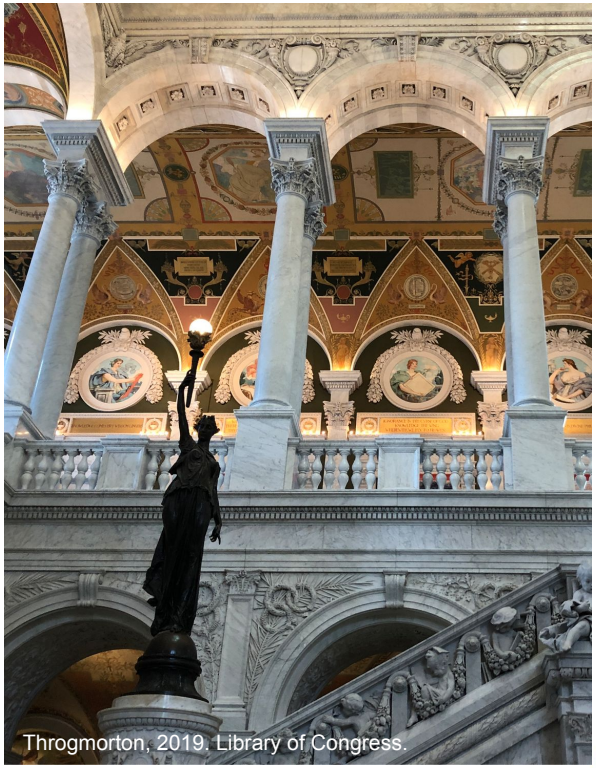
Interests & Activities

Considering the interests of your local user community, indicate your library's likely or current level of activity, on a scale ranging from "Unlikely" to become active to "Highly active" now.

	Unlikely	Somewhat likely	Likely	Somewhat active	Active	Highly Active	Unsure
Provide links to open data portals or other open data sources through your website	○	○	○	◉	○	○	○
Provide reference assistance for community members on finding or using open data	○	○	○	○	◉	○	○
Build collections of open data of value to your community	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Offer professional development to library personnel on open data	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Offer programs for the community on the benefits and use of open data	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Collaborate with local government agencies to make their data available to the public	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Publish our library's data as open data	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

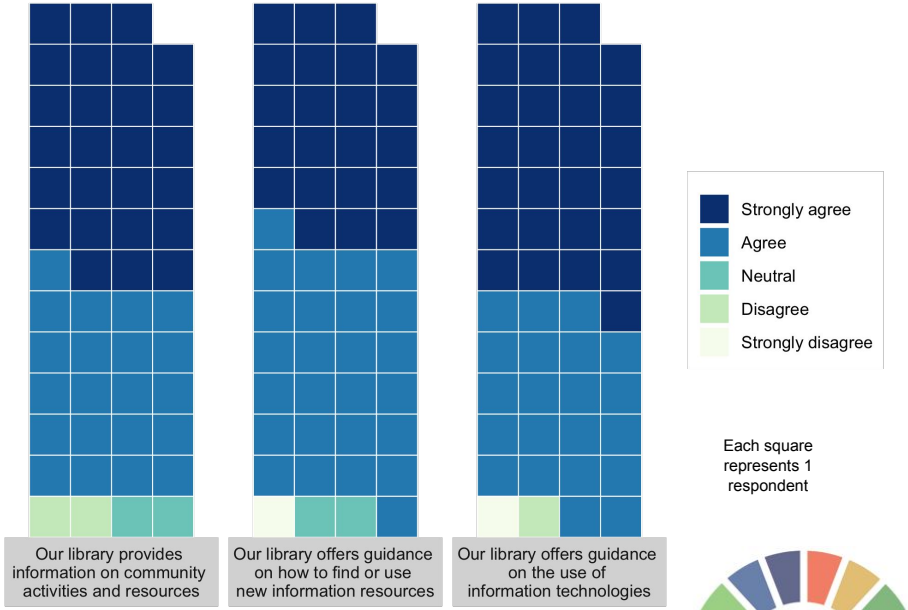
Strong Alignments

- High degree of **foundational alignment** and **cognate commitments**
- Limited disagreement with directions and principles


Throgmorton, 2019. Library of Congress.

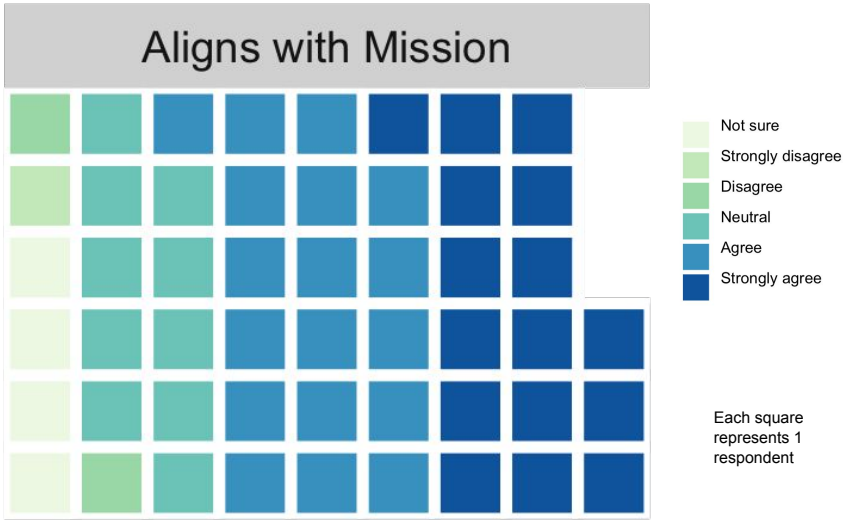
High Levels of IT, New Information Resources

- Baseline, open-data-adjacent services → > 90% provide:
  - guidance on information technologies
  - guidance on new information resources
  - information on community activities / resources



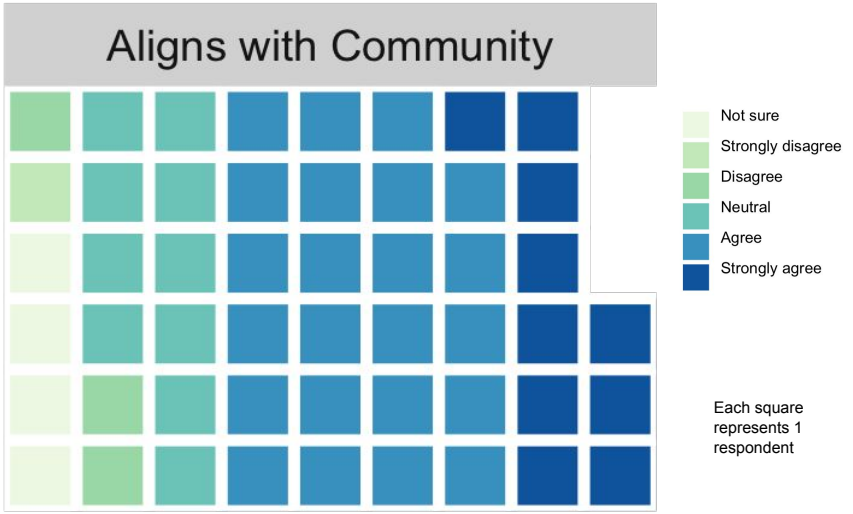
Open data in scope of mission

- 66.7% agree or strongly agree open data initiatives align with:
  - **Library mission**
- Only 5.9% disagree (or strongly disagree)



Open data in scope of community interests

- 64.7% agree or strongly agree open data initiatives align with:
  - **Community interests**
- Only 7.8% disagree (or strongly disagree)

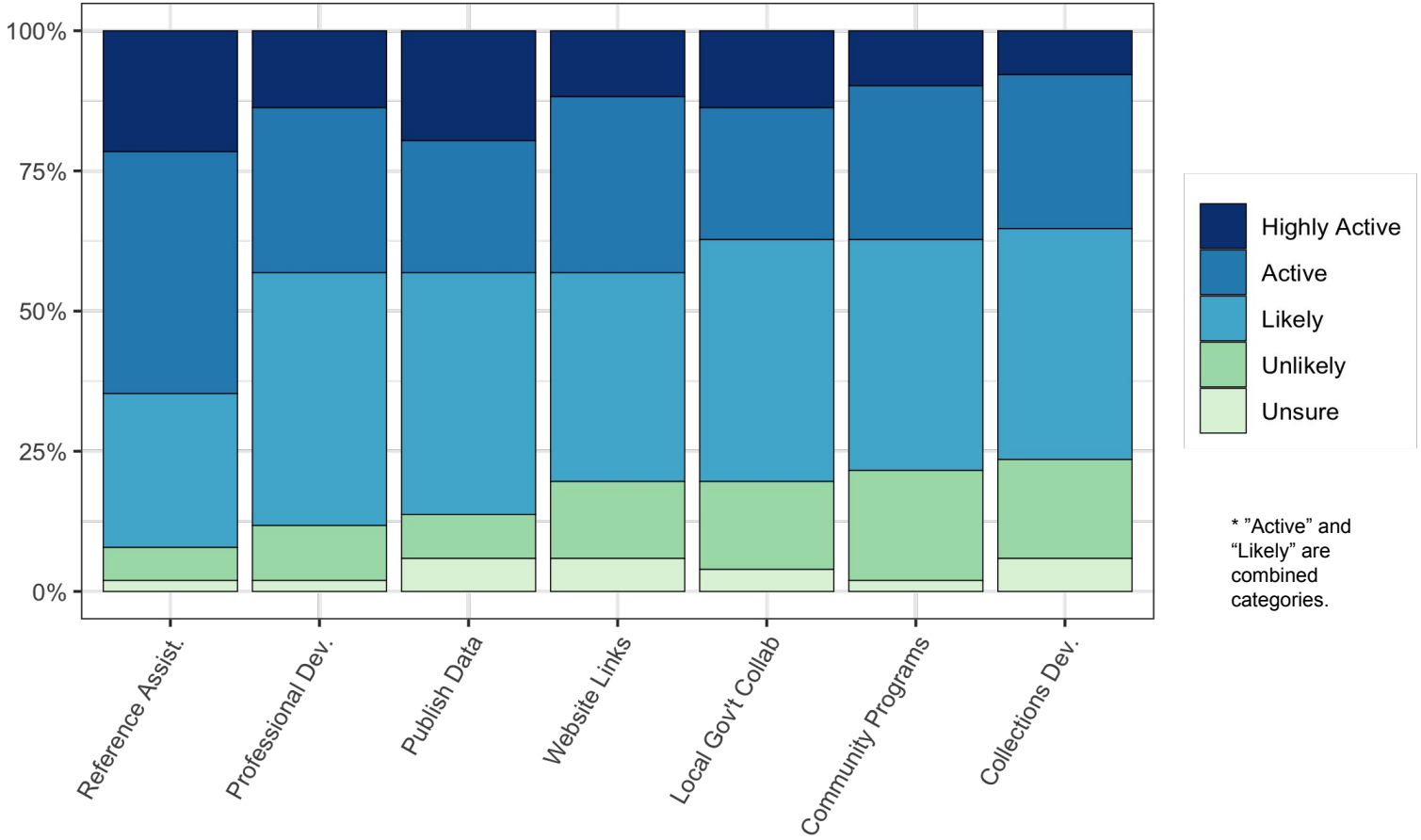


Open Data Enthusiasm

- **43.1%** active or highly active in **reference assistance** for community members finding or using open data

- **33.3%** active or highly active in **publishing library data as open data**

Interests & Activities



* "Active" and "Likely" are combined categories.

Open Data Hesitations

- **18%** unlikely to **build collections of open data** of value to their community

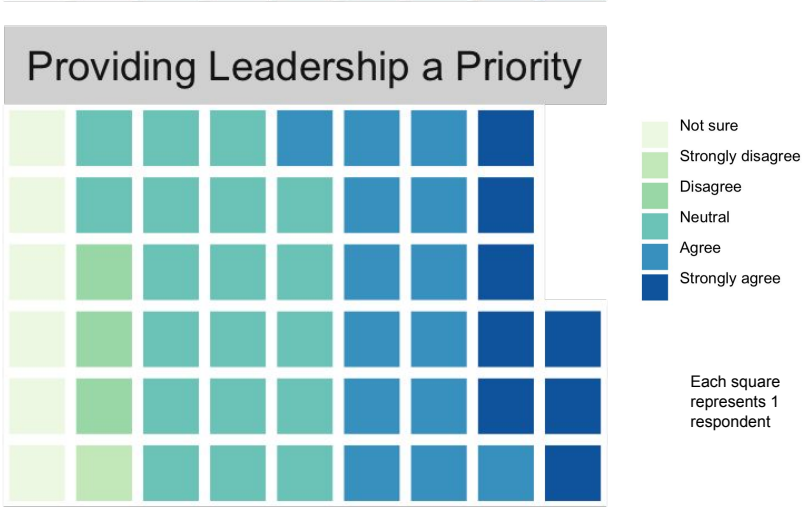
- **20%** unlikely to **offer community programming** on open data

Critical Tension

The importance of open data leadership is recognized by many:

- 43% agree or strongly agree:
  - **Providing leadership for local open data initiatives should be a priority <u>for our library</u>**

- But with 37% neutral; 7.9% disagree (or strongly disagree)

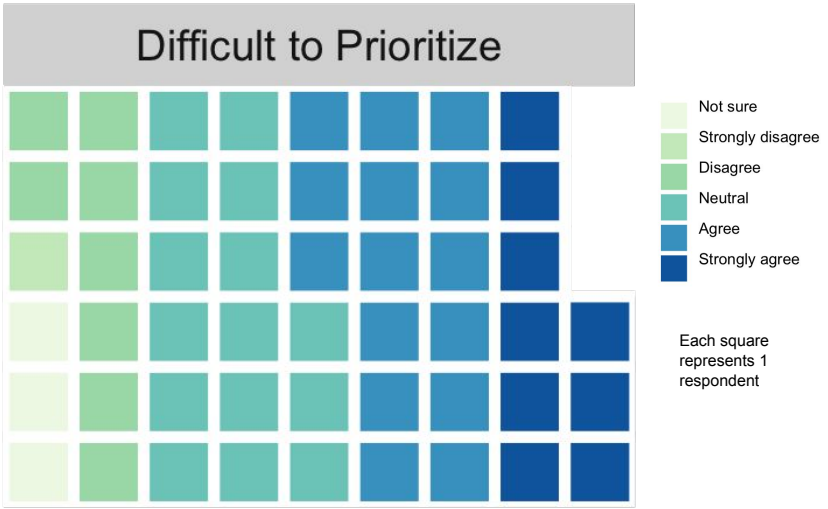


Critical Tension

At the same time,

- 47% agree or strongly agree:
  - **“It will be very difficult for our library to prioritize open data initiatives.”**

- But with 29.4% neutral; 15.7% disagree (or strongly disagree)



Essential Resources

Increased operating budget	**69%**
New or improved collaboration with city, state, or other partners	**67%**
Professional development on access, use, and instruction	**57%**
Support from data publishing platform	**51%**

Conclusion

Not all libraries are or will be engaged in open data in the near future.

But for many, it is less about *if* —
and more about **when** and **what**?

Grey, 2011. Flickr. CC0.

Acknowledgements

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Data, code for visualizations, and other presentation materials available at: **https://github.com/OpenDataLiteracy/ASIST2020**

Q&A

- What roles are state libraries best prepared to play in advancing open data initiatives in public libraries?

- As open data becomes more integral to public library services, what are the curriculum implications for your LIS program?

- What open data resources do you think are most important for public libraries to promote / most valuable to local communities?