

**Evaluation Action Plan for Oak Ridge Public Library's Seed Exchange**

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### **Abstract**

Oak Ridge Public Library (ORPL) is seeking to expand upon its existing seed exchange programs by developing new related programs. The library is considering a wide range of options, from bringing the seed library to the Oak Ridge Farmers Market to starting a community garden. In order to determine what types of new programs or other additions public library users would be most interested in seeing, an online survey will be conducted. This survey will be used to gauge public interest in the various possible extensions of the seed exchange. It will also be used to determine which ideas hold the most promise in terms of accomplishing some of ORPL's current strategic aims, such as increasing program offerings for adults between 34 and 54.

## **Evaluation Action Plan for Oak Ridge Public Library's Seed Exchange**

### **Rationale for User-Centered Assessment**

Oak Ridge Public Library (ORPL) is seeking to build upon its successful seed exchange program to increase usage by making the seed library more accessible and to increase community engagement by creating new programs. Currently, a variety of different means of expansion are under consideration, including taking the seed library to the local farmers market and starting a community garden (J. Kearney, personal communication, March 4, 2020). In order to ensure that any new programs or services developed by ORPL match the interests of library users, a user-centered evaluation will be conducted.

ORPL's seed exchange currently caters primarily to home gardeners, most of whom are at least somewhat experienced in gardening (Brock, 2018; J. Kearney, personal communication, March 4, 2020). By evaluating the seed exchange from the users' perspective, ORPL can learn what additions or changes to the program would entice new types of users, such as inexperienced home gardeners, farmers, or community gardeners.

### ***Problems and Opportunities***

The primary problem that this assessment is addressing is the overwhelming number of possible directions for extending ORPL's seed exchange program. This problem is augmented by the time and staffing constraints that prevent the library from attempting all of them. The seed library is run by a part-time librarian, who works ten hours per week, so time for developing new programs is scarce (J. Kearney, personal communication, March 4, 2020). It is therefore paramount that time that is available for programming is focused on developing the programs that the community will find the most useful and enjoyable.

ORPL also has a few strategic aims that could be addressed through the extension of the seed exchange program. The library is seeking opportunities to bring programming outside the library, and the seed library may be an effective way to accomplish that. This assessment will measure interest in having the seed library brought to other locations, such as the local farmers market. Another goal is to develop additional programming for adults. A previous survey conducted by ORPL found that adults between 34 and 54 were underserved by the library in terms of programming. The assessment will be used to identify programs that appeal to that age group so that they can be prioritized. Finally, ORPL is working on increasing circulation of its

adult nonfiction collection. This assessment will gauge interest in a gardening related book club, which could serve as a means of marketing a selection of adult nonfiction.

### **Scope of Analysis and Data to be Collected**

The primary purpose of this assessment is to identify the most promising possibilities for building upon ORPL's seed exchange program. The user feedback gathered through this assessment will be used to determine what direction to go in in terms of extending the seed exchange. To that end, most of the data that needs to be collected pertains to interest levels in different possible extensions of ORPL's seed exchange program. The list of ideas that participants will be asked about are based on ideas from Joan Kearney, the ORPL librarian in charge of the seed exchange, as well as on seed library and garden-related programming at other libraries (Kallunki, 2015; Morehart, 2019; Taylor et al., 2014) and include the following: plant swaps, gardening themed crafts, bringing the seed library to the local farmers market, offering gardening tools for check out, gardening themed book clubs, relevant documentary screenings and discussions, online or physical instructional resource guides for gardening, an online seed catalog, educational talks on topics related to gardening or agriculture, gardening demonstrations, ask a Master Gardener sessions, and the creation of a community garden. Because there are multiple types of community gardens, data on participants' preferred community garden models will also be collected.

Data on participants' ages will be collected so that the other data can be organized and analyzed by age groups. This will allow the ORPL to home in on the interests of its target age groups. In order to determine what new services or programs are most likely to develop new library users and new seed library users, participants will also be asked about the frequency with which they use the library, their interest level in using the seed library as it is, and their level of experience with gardening.

The data collected will be primarily quantitative in nature, as numerical data will allow clear comparisons of levels of interest for different programs. However, in order to allow participants who would like to explain their answers or offer additional suggestions to do so, a limited amount of qualitative data will also be collected. This will enable participants who would like to explain their answers or enter additional suggestions to do so.

## **Participant Recruitment**

Ideally, participants would have been drawn exclusively from Oak Ridge and surrounding areas of East Tennessee, and would have included a wide range of relevant users including home gardeners of varying experience levels, farmers, and community garden participants. It would also have been useful to include participants from possible partner organizations, such as Oak Ridge National Lab, the University of Tennessee Extension, the Oak Ridge public school system, and the local farmers market. However, because of current restrictions and fluctuating schedules due to COVID-19, the survey participant pool has been broadened to include individuals outside the region. Participants will include master's students in the School of Information Sciences, as well as personal contacts.

Because one of the goals of this assessment is to identify programs that appeal to specific age groups, participants from a wide range of ages will be included. Particular attention will be paid to recruiting adults between the ages of 35 and 54, as that age range has been identified as underserved at ORPL (Forkner, 2020).

The survey will be distributed by April 4, 2020, with responses requested by April 14. This will give participants ten days to respond, which should be sufficient to maximize the number of participants, while also allowing adequate time to analyze the data by April 17. Conclusions drawn from this study will then be passed along to ORPL's librarians.

## **Data Collection Instrument**

Due to library closures and other restrictions imposed by COVID-19, it was determined that an online survey would be the most appropriate means of data collection method. An eight question survey was designed using SurveyMonkey, and it can be accessed at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7VB89RG>. See Appendix for a copy of the survey as it appeared to respondents.

The questions are designed to determine the interest level in the various possible extensions of ORPL's seed exchange program. Much of the survey is intended to assess interest levels in various types of gardening-related programming. A Likert scale was determined to be the most appropriate means of measuring interest levels, as it allows for a more nuanced evaluation than a dichotomous question. The questions have participants rank their interest or the likelihood of them using a particular service on a five-point scale. To maximize survey completion, no open-ended questions were included; however, many of the questions do include

optional comment boxes in which participants can suggest their own ideas. Each question is listed and discussed individually in further detail below.

**What is your age?** Because the library is also currently working on increasing engagement of specific age groups, participants are asked to specify their age so that programming ideas that appeal to currently underserved age groups can be separated out and prioritized. Rather than asking participants to type their age, the question is formatted as multiple choice with several age ranges to select from. This was done both to make the survey easier to complete and to prevent erroneous data caused by typos.

**How frequently do you visit your public library?** Participants are again provided with multiple choice options: 4 or more times a month, 1-3 times a month, less than once a month, never, and only online. This question is included so that information for frequent library users can be compared to those who rarely or never visit the library. This will help determine what types of programs or services are most likely to bring in new and infrequent library users.

**Please check all of the following statements about your gardening experience that apply.** As previously mentioned, ORPL's seed library users tend to be somewhat experienced gardeners. Making the seed library accessible and appealing to new and inexperienced gardeners is therefore a crucial piece of increasing seed library usage and expanding the program. Data gathered from this question will make it possible to separate out responses from participants without much gardening experience and see what changes or additions would make the seed library feel more usable and useful to them.

**How likely are you to use a seed exchange service at your public library?** Participants are asked to rank their likeliness on a sliding scale from one to five. This question is included primarily to be looked at in combination with the results for the following question.

**Which of the following would make you more likely to use the seed library? Please check all that apply.** With the data from the previous question, this question will be used to identify new services or resources that would make individuals who are currently not likely to use a seed library more likely to do so. Participants are given six options to select from—a collection of online instructional gardening resources, physical instructional gardening resources, basic gardening tools available for check out, bringing the seed library to a more convenient location (e.g. the farmers market), and space for gardening (e.g. a community garden plot)—and an option to write in additional suggestions. As previously mentioned, these options are based on

ideas ORPL librarians are currently considering, as well as relevant offerings at other libraries with seed libraries.

**Which community garden model would you be most interested in participating in?**

Participants are asked to indicate whether they would prefer individual garden plots or communal garden plots. They are also given the option to indicate that they would not be interested in a community garden at the library. This question will gauge both overall interest in participation in a library garden and preferences between the two primary models of community gardens (Denver Urban Gardens, 2012).

**If the following events were held at your local public library, how likely would you be to attend: plant swap, gardening demonstrations, ask a Master Gardener, agriculture and food themed book club, documentary screenings and discussions, and garden-themed crafts?** This question will help determine the types of programs that library patrons will be most interested in. Because the amount of time library staff has for planning programming is currently the limiting factor for programs at ORPL (J. Kearney, personal communication, March 4, 2020), it is especially important that the time spent on programming is used for programs with relatively broad appeal, so that the interests of as many community members as possible are catered to. As previously mentioned, the suggestions are based on existing ORPL programming, ideas from ORPL librarians, and relevant programs at other libraries.

**The library invites guest speakers to give talks at gardening round tables. Please select your interest level for each of the following topics: alternative gardening methods, food production systems, beekeeping, agriculture and climate change, seed saving and seed politics, agroecology, pollinators.** This question is intended to identify topics related to seeds and gardening. Once again, the topics were pulled primarily from programs at other libraries, and participants are given the option to write in additional suggestions as well. Similar to the previous question, the data gathered from this question will be used to determine what topics library patrons are most interested in learning more about by attending educational programs. The data from this question and the previous question will also be used in conjunction with the age data to identify topics and events that are most appealing to adults between 34 and 54, the age group for which ORPL is currently working to increase engagement in library programming.

Because survey participation is entirely voluntary and consent is therefore implicit, and because this data collection is for an informal assessment, as opposed to formal academic

research, and IRB review is not required, no consent form is required. As the survey is being completed online and does not ask for names, contact information, or any other identifiable personal information, participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

### **Budget**

This assessment will focus on ORPL's seed exchange and potential related programs and services. The goal is to gather enough information to determine what programs and services related to the seed library would be most useful to add. When this is completed at the end of the semester, the library will have the information necessary to decide on next steps in terms of what changes and additions to start working on. The next phase will involve designing the new programs or services that have been selected based on the results from this survey. While it is difficult to determine specifics before analyzing the survey results and determining what types of new services or programs might be added, a general plan for continued user-centered assessment can be made. During the design phase, further evaluation can be done to ensure that user-centered design principles are followed when designing specifics of any new programs or services. While conducting additional surveys or interviews for every individual project is likely impractical, ORPL librarians can create user personas for each of the primary, secondary, and tertiary user groups. Personas can be used during the design process to ensure the design accounts for all or most users' needs and preferences (Sundt & Davis, 2017). Though this process does not require participant recruitment or data analysis like a survey would, it is still quite time consuming. Table 1 lays out an approximated budget, using an estimated librarian salary of thirty dollars per hour, and assuming that two new programs are implemented as extensions of the seed exchange.

Table 2		
<i>Budget for User Centered Design for ORPL's Seed Exchange Program Extensions</i>		
	Time	Approximate Cost
Creating three user personas (one each for the primary, secondary, and tertiary user groups)	2 hours	\$60



Assessing the design of new program (#1)	3 hours	\$90
Assessing the design of new program (#2)	3 hours	\$90
TOTALS	8 hours	\$240

Continued assessment is also important. ORPL has conducted assessments of its programs in the past, and may have tools that can be reused, depending on the nature of the new projects. However, new tools, such as satisfaction surveys, may need to be developed as well. In addition to creating the appropriate assessment tools, time will need to be spent analyzing the data in order to determine what, if any, changes should be made to the programs. The approximate monthly budget for time and funds for this continued assessment is shown in Table 2.

Table 2		
<i>Monthly Budget for Ongoing Assessment of the Seed Exchange and Related Programming</i>		
	Time	Approximate Monthly Cost
Development of three assessment tools (one for the seed library and one for each of the two new programs)	3 hours	\$90
Data collection tools (e.g. survey creation tool)	N/A	\$25
Data analysis	6 hours	\$180
TOTALS	9 hours	\$295

It is important to note that this budget is exclusively for the evaluation of the seed exchange and related programming. It does not include the additional funds which will likely be required to implement many of the changes and additions that are identified through these assessments. Additional time will be required to design, redesign, and implement any new programs. Many of the projects will also require funds for materials. The community garden, for

example, will require funds for soil testing, land preparation, gardening equipment, and other supplies and tools depending on the design of the garden.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The responses to the questions which use a Likert scale (questions 7 and 8) will be analyzed quantitatively. There is also a multiselect question that asks participants about the utility of potential new services (question 5); data from this question will be analyzed quantitatively as well. For each question the overall interest for each potential program or service will be compared to determine which ideas are most popular. Responses will also be divided by respondents' ages and compared to identify any programs or services that are most appealing to specific age groups, particularly the underserved 35-54 age range. The other baseline questions about library usage, gardening experience, and current interest in using a seed library will be used similarly to determine, for example, what programs show the most promise for bringing in individuals who are currently infrequent library users, which services would make the seed library most accessible to inexperienced gardeners, and what additions would be most effective for boosting seed library usage.

The survey also includes a question about community garden models (question 6). The two primary models of community gardens are individual and communal. These models are briefly explained in the question, and participants are asked which model they are most likely to participate in. Participants are also given a third option which they can select if they would not be interested in participating in either type of community garden. The purpose of this question is twofold: to gauge overall interest in community gardening, and to determine which style of garden is preferred by most respondents. Both of these will be determined quantitatively.

All open-ended responses left in the survey's comment boxes will be analyzed qualitatively to identify any common themes or patterns. Any suggested programs or services will be compiled and summarized, with emphasis placed on ideas that are suggested multiple times.

## References

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## Appendix

### Public Library Seed Exchange Survey

Seed exchanges are becoming increasingly popular at public libraries. Most consist of a collection of seeds, often with a focus on local and/or heirloom varieties, from which library users are able to "borrow" at no cost. Seed exchange users are asked to return seeds to the library at the end of growing season by saving seeds from their mature plants.

This survey is intended to gauge interest in potential extensions of a seed exchange program at a public library in East Tennessee. Thank you for your participation!

\* 1. What is your age?

- ☐ under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 or older

\* 2. How frequently do you visit your public library?

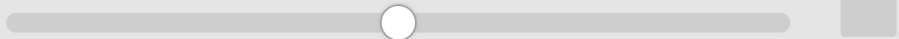
- ☐ 4 or more times a month
- ☐ 1-3 times a month
- ☐ Occasionally (less than once a month)
- ☐ I only use online library services
- ☐ I do not use public libraries
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 3. Please check all of the following statements about your gardening experience that apply.

- ☐ I have grown plants from seeds
- ☐ I have grown plants from cuttings
- ☐ I have transplanted seedlings
- ☐ I have maintained an outdoor garden or houseplants
- ☐ I have saved seeds from a plant
- ☐ I consider myself to be an experienced home gardener
- ☐ I am a Master Gardener
- ☐ I have professional experience growing produce or other plants
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 4. How likely are you to use a seed exchange service at your public library?

very unlikely      neutral      very likely



\* 5. Which of the following would make you more likely to use the seed library? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ A collection of online instructional gardening resources (e.g. a gardening LibGuide)
- ☐ Physical instructional gardening resources (e.g. gardening books available for check out)
- ☐ Basic gardening tools available for check out
- ☐ A way to check the availability of specific seed types online
- ☐ Bringing the seed library to a more convenient location (e.g. the farmers market)
- ☐ Space for gardening (e.g. a community garden plot)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 6. The library is considering starting a community garden. Which model would you be most interested in participating in?

- ☐ Individual garden plots - participants are assigned individual plots and are responsible for planting and maintaining their own plots
- ☐ Communal garden - the community tends the garden together and shares the produce
- ☐ I would not be interested in participating in a library community garden

Comments

\* 7. If the following events were held at your local public library, how likely would you be to attend?

	very unlikely	unlikely	neutral	likely	very likely
Plant swap (bring plants, cuttings, and seeds to trade with neighbors)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gardening demonstrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ask a Master Gardener (drop in and ask an expert your gardening questions)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agriculture and food themed book club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Documentary screenings and discussions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Garden crafts (e.g. decorating pots)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Any comments or program suggestions? (optional)

\* 8. The library invites guest speakers to give talks at gardening round tables. Please select your interest level for each of the following topics.

	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Neutral	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Alternative gardening methods (e.g. hydroponics, vertical gardening)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food production systems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Beekeeping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agriculture and climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seed saving and seed politics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agroecology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pollinators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Any other topics you would be interested in learning more about?