

Adult Books on CDs Collection Evaluation

Minh E. Elan

School of Information Science and Learning Technologies, University of Missouri

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Dr. Beth Brendler

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I will be evaluating a collection at Neill Public Library (NPL), a municipal public library in Pullman, Washington that serves the city of Pullman and surrounding areas (City of Pullman, n.d.). Neill Public Library is a popular materials library, with most collections based on a combination of format and age group (Neill Public Library, 2014). For example, books on CDs can be found in two collections: Youth Books on CDs and Adult Books on CDs.

My goal is to evaluate the Adult Books on CDs collection. CDs players have become less common, neither likely to be included in new cars, nor widely available in brick-and-mortar stores. The decreased popularity of this format leads to questions about the future of the collection. Broadly, my goal is to determine whether it is important to maintain this collection, and if so, how best to do so. Based on collection evaluation results, plans may include reallocating funding to another collection or adopting new purchasing strategies.

Questions

Questions that will help determine the value of maintaining this collection include: What is the cost-per-use of a book? How often do items circulate? Who is using the collection? What are their experiences, expectations or needs? Item circulation and cost-per-use data provide quantitative information about the cost of this collection. Additionally, information about the primary users of this collection act as qualitative data about this collection's value, providing important information on top of cost. For example, it is likely that books on CDs have a lower circulation rate in general compared to other library collections; however, if patrons with blindness or low vision exclusively use this collection, it would be worth maintaining for accessibility and equitability reasons.

If there is reason to believe that this collection is worth maintaining, then the next steps in

the collection evaluation are to investigate if the collection is well balanced and reflective of its user base and their interests. Important questions to ask include: What percentage of the collection gets use? Do certain items within the collection circulate more than others? If they do, are there shared characteristics of more or less popular items? How often are books on CDs borrowed via interlibrary loan, and what titles or topics are borrowed? Ideally, a large percentage of the collection would be regularly circulating, and interlibrary loan requests would be few and far between, with few repeated requests. If only a small portion of the collection is circulating or if specific topics or titles are frequently borrowed from other libraries, there may be a gap between user needs and library offerings.

Methods

The Adult Books on CDs collection, containing 1,875 unique titles, is likely small enough for a moderately comprehensive collection evaluation to be conducted (Neill Public Library, 2023). A mixed methods approach would be best for this evaluation. Quantitative methods will yield data about the current usage and cost of adult books on CDs, while the descriptive information derived from qualitative methods may provide insight into the experiences and needs of those who use this collection.

Collection Value

Methods that would help inform cost-benefit analyses of the collection include quantitative methods like circulation studies and cost per use studies, as well as qualitative methods like user surveys.

Use Studies

Circulation data can be pulled using reports native to NPL's integrated library system, Horizon. Statistics that can be compiled include date of last checkout, total number of checkouts,

date item was added to the collection, and publication date. This data would then be exported to Excel for analysis. This data could be aggregated to explore the general turnover of this collection or to compare the turnover of this collection to others. Since NPL does not collect borrower circulation history by default, statistics linking user groups to circulation are not possible.

Cost Per Use Studies

Rough cost per use estimates can be extrapolated using a combination of circulation data and purchasing information. Although NPL does not save item costs in Horizon ILS, an average cost of adult books on CDs can be calculated using total annual expenditures in books on CDs and the total number of adult books on CDs added to the collection in the respective year. Average cost of an adult book on CDs can then be compared to circulation rates to obtain rough measures of cost per use. It would be especially illuminating if adult books on CDs are expensive to purchase and the collection has very low circulation rates. Accounting for staff time spent processing and circulating adult books on CDs could add depth to cost per use data; however, deeper metrics such as these are beyond the scope of a simple collection evaluation.

User Surveys

While surveys could be used to obtain information about both users and non-users of this collection, a survey geared toward active users of the collection would be more relevant to a cost-benefit analysis. Specifically, surveys targeting adult book on CDs borrowers could yield important descriptive and contextual information about their experiences, needs, and expectations. This information could be analyzed to identify benefits of the collection.

Surveys could be provided in various ways. Staff could place paper surveys inside CDs cases, then exchange completed surveys for new ones during the return and reshelving process.

Surveys could also be placed at the circulation desk and self-checkout machines, so that patrons who have borrowed adult books on CDs in the past can also provide feedback. Prizes could be offered as incentive for survey completion. Survey questions might include: How did you discover books on CDs? How frequently do you borrow books on CDs? Do you borrow books in other formats? If you borrow books on CDs exclusively, why is this your preferred format? If you borrow books in many formats, what influences your choice of format? Surveys could include a question about the respondent's willingness to be interviewed on the topic more, in case continued conversation would be useful.

Collection Quality

Methods that would highlight strengths and weaknesses of the collection include the quantitative methods: use studies, Interlibrary Loan analysis, and In-House Use studies, and the qualitative method: user surveys.

Use Studies

The circulation data pulled previously for general collection circulation can be explored further for insight in to which parts of the collection get frequent use. Because items at NPL are not divided by genre, this would be a labor-intensive portion of analyses. After determining frequency of circulation for items, titles would need to be cross-referenced against tags and search results to collect information about their subject, genre, or topic. The results would then be analyzed for circulation patterns.

In-House Use Studies

In-house use numbers can be obtained from a Horizon ILS report. Having data regarding items that are browsed but not borrowed can help provide a more complete picture of the use of adult books on CDs. If items with high in-house use numbers share similarities in genre or topic,

it may be that there is interest in these types of items but that the quality of the owned items are not considered acceptable to patrons. For example, if most of the books on CDs with high in-house use frequency are about heart disease and published over five years ago, this could indicate that users are looking for current information about heart disease.

Interlibrary Loan Analysis

Analyzing how frequently adult books on CDs are borrowed via interlibrary loan (ILL) and compiling information about the titles borrowed can also provide insight in to gaps in the collection. This is especially true if books on certain topics or genres are frequently requested by patrons. At NPL, interlibrary loan records are recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. Details include patron names, item title, author, and publication date, and which NPL collection the item would fit in if it were owned by our library. Identifying which interlibrary loans were adult books on CDs is a simple matter of sorting by NPL collection. The next step would be to count the number of non-owned adult books on CDs requested. Genres, subjects, or topics of ILL titles would need to be identified through title-by-title research.

User Surveys

In addition to survey questions about user characteristics and preference for books on CDs, surveys could include questions about the contents of the Adult Books on CDs collection. Users can be surveyed regarding their preferred genres and the extent to which materials in the collection meet their needs. The answers to these questions have the potential to uncover unmet expectations not revealed via the quantitative methods listed above, as some users may choose not to make their needs known and to make do with the collection as it currently exists.

Other Methods Considered

Some methods that were considered but are not well suited to this collection evaluation

include conspectus, user observation, direct collection analysis, and comparative statistics. A conspectus is a method that examines a collection's existing strengths in terms of educational depth or value of materials, such as introductory, basic, intermediate, and advanced (Johnson, 2018, 292-293). These determinations are more pertinent to academic libraries, whose missions typically include providing materials for educational purposes, than to public libraries. NPL's goals as a popular materials library would not explicitly include providing educational-use materials (City of Pullman, n.d.).

Another method considered was user observation. Although observing user behaviors might provide insight not found via other avenues, doing so is time- and labor-intensive. Considering the small footprint of this collection and limited staff time, the benefits of user observation are unlikely to outweigh the cost of staff time expended. Direct collection analysis also would not be suited to evaluating the Adult Books on CDs collection. Since primary evaluation objectives include determining costs, benefits, and popularity of items, directly reviewing the content and condition of checked-in items would not supply meaningful or relevant information.

Lastly, comparative statistics are not an effective method to use due to limitations in existing statistics. Although the annual Public Libraries Survey provides statistics on libraries that could be used comparatively, the data does not specifically address books on CDs (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.). Thus, to obtain relevant statistics for the collection evaluation, a comparable library would need to commit their own staff time to providing statistics for our use. Considering the timeframe such an endeavor might require, this method is not well-suited for this collection evaluation.

Discussion

If cost-benefit analyses demonstrate that the collection is not of prohibitive cost and used largely by members of a higher needs group, then we can consider the value of the collection to outweigh its cost. Subsequently, if the collection is worth maintaining, further investigation utilizing the methods discussed previously can be used to identify higher performing and lower performing items in the collection. This will impact purchasing and weeding processes for this collection. Conversely, if the cost-benefit analyses indicate that this collection's cost outweighs its benefits, further study should be conducted investigating whether removing the collection will leave any specific demographic at a marked disadvantage, and if so, how best to meet their needs moving forward.

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