Information School
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Open Data Wagon:
Opening Up Mobile Services Data in Public Libraries

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Information Problem:

Before this project, limited data about bookmobiles was publicly available as open data, preventing easy information sharing between libraries about mobile services, which are crucial[1], but also very expensive[2].

Understanding the Landscape

Sponsored by the Washington State Library (WSL), this project aimed to:
- **increase information sharing** in libraries,
- **expand funding** opportunities for mobile services by providing additional data, and
- **heighten the value of mobile services**, while also emphasizing ethics, accessibility, and protection of user privacy.

To better understand the landscape, we surveyed the literature about mobile services, library data, and open data — finding that at their most fundamental levels, bookmobiles and open data promise the same ideal: **information access for everyone**[3][4].

Creating a Dataset Template

In this phase, we conducted interviews with mobile services librarians and geospatial data experts to understand best practices and considerations for creating a sustainable and useful bookmobile dataset template.

Why It Matters

- **First open library data of its kind** — and a groundbreaking area in which WSL can grow their data collection
- Serves as an **initial framework for how to measure less circulation-centric library services** — key for vital access services supporting small communities

Collecting Data

After our research, we collected data from our pilot library, North Central Regional Library, based throughout north central Washington state. Using the template we created, we identified the following core data fields.

Core Data Fields*:
- StopIdentifier
- CheckoutDate
- ReturnDate
- CheckoutCounts
- ItemType
- ItemLanguage
- Title
- Creator
- PubYear
- CardType
- StopType
- Latitude
- Longitude
- StopMonth
- StopYear
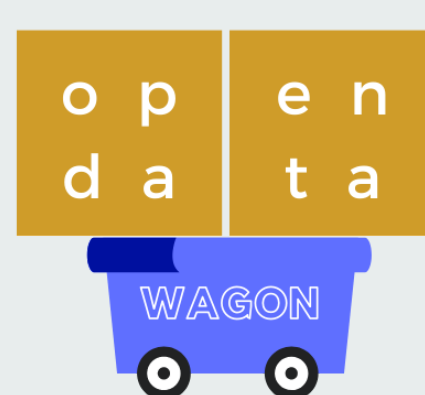- StopDuration
- StopRoadCondition

*Note: Though these fields were identified as most useful by subject experts and research literature, we had to slim these down in the final dataset to be published to accomodate our pilot's actual available data.

Preparing to Publish

In collaboration with WSL, we're working to clean and document the data. As the final step, **we will publish Washington's first (possibly the U.S.'s first) open bookmobile data** on data.wa.gov.

References:
1. Yarrow, A., & Mcallister, S. (2018). Trends in mobile and outreach services. *Public Library Quarterly, 37*(2), 195-208. doi: 10.1080/01616846.2018.1436365.
2. Dankowski, T. (2018). By the numbers: Bookmobiles. *American Libraries*. https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/03/01/by-the-numbers-bookmobiles/
3. Okamoto, K. (2016). Introducing open government data. *The Reference Librarian, 58*(2), 111-123. doi: 10.1080/02763877.2016.1199005.
4. Udell, E. (2019). Countdown to the vote. *American Libraries*. https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/11/01/countdown-vote-libraries-voter-registration/