USER SATISFACTION SURVEY OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Public libraries are established to cater to the needs of general public. So to increase the footfalls and to connect to the users of various age groups and diverse interest, different types of community outreach activities are organised by them. So the current study is a survey of satisfaction of users' and their opinions for the improvement of these activities. It is necessary to consider the feedback and the suggestions given by the end users regarding these activities that involve the investment in the form of time and energy of all the staff involved.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Community outreach activities, User Satisfaction

Introduction

Public Libraries are working as the catalyst of social change. It connects the general public to the scholars ideas presented in the form of books. Various age groups and diversified readers have made the functioning of public libraries bit difficult and challenging. There is a constant need of increasing footfalls in these libraries. This is possible by constant and continuous contact with the society on the whole through various activities. This is where the community outreach programs come into picture. Various challenges posed by the digital world have made these libraries serious about reaching to the community through quality changes in the services based on the suggestions provided by such demanding users. Outreach activities reach to the community and play an important role in the development of services by getting connected to these centers of knowledge and information.

Community Outreach Activities: An overview

Outreach in libraries is not a new concept but it extends roots to more than 40 years. In 1984, W.J. Martin wrote "Outreach has had some influence upon library affairs during the past ten to fifteen years." "Service to the disadvantaged", "service to special groups", "extension activities", "service to the un-served", "community librarianship" and "beyond the traditional library" are some phrases associated with this concept. The goal of community outreach within a library is to develop library outreach programs for non-users, the underserved, and people with special needs within the community. Communities are living

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things; they are constantly growing and to meet the diverse needs of any community, libraries must keep in touch with these changes and tailor services to meet ever-changing needs. These services are required for the following purposes:

- To increase the visibility of the library and to connect to the community people
- To develop strong public relations by reaching at their place
- To widen the user base and enhance goodwill by rebranding program
- To achieve organizational mission and goals and to generate funds
- To enhance the technical skills of the employees and have strong networking

Types of Community Outreach Activities

In this competitive world, it is important to promote library and its services for academic as well as public libraries. Reaching the community through various activities requires planned efforts by the librarian and other staff. This builds the goodwill and ensures the support of local people. As a part of community outreach activities, there is a list of services that can be provided to involve more and more people and benefit them from the library resources.[5] The purpose of these activities is to create a win-win situation for both the library as well as the society.

- Doing Career focus activities for youth like arranging seminars and conferences on UPSC/MPSC or other professional courses
- Arranging book talks or discussions to enhance reading habits
- Inviting Eminent personalities to talk on local needs
- Using Social Media on regular basis to share the information about the library programs and its services
- Arrange one special meeting with the local civic group to discuss the availability of resources and to find out the requirements of the community
- Be a part of such civic groups and represent your library while planning for various activities of the society.
- Provide information about various services and online resources that can be used by the community for the research
- Regular communication with the nearby schools and colleges so as to keep the faculty informed about the various resources that can be used for different projects or assignments by their students.
- Do presentations for the local business and their employees
- Regular meetings with service agencies and organizations like literacy councils, health departments, local job centers, young entrepreneurs, learners pursuing competitive examinations.

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- Distribute CDs giving information about library, it's hours, programs and services.

- Create a virtual tour of library on the website

- Regular write-up in local newspapers and cable channels to highlight the various programs undertaken by the library for the local public.

- Arrange book talk and highlight local experts on topics related to library issues

- Public Service Announcement regarding Library Card Sign-Up Month or propagating "support your library" messages

- Prepare a "Welcome to the Library" packet for all new residents and distribute it through retailers and other shops.

- Tie-up during local festivals with local organizations and circulate electronic newsletter

- Link to the official website of local bodies and businessmen

- Arranging book exhibitions cum sales and inviting carrier experts

Objectives of the study

Therefore, the current study is undertaken with the following objectives:

1)   To study the most favored outreach activity as per the users.

2)   To find out the overall satisfaction of users regarding the various types of outreach activities

3)   To give suggestions regarding the improvement of such activities

Research Methodology

Since these activities require investment of time, energy and efforts, it is necessary to find its effectiveness from the end users. Therefore, 100 users of 5 public libraries of suburban areas selected on random basis were interviewed to share their opinion about these activities.   Out of them, 54% respondents belong to age group of 15-25 years, while 27% respondents belonging to 25-35 years, 6% respondents were in age group of 35-45 years and 13% respondents belong to 45 & above years. This shows that the majority respondents belong to 15-25 years of age, i.e. the young users who always want some innovative methods of dealing with their demands.

Findings of the study

The major findings of the study are as follows:

1)   60% of the users agreed that they get information regularly about the outreach activities

2)   As regards the source of information, maximum users agreed that through notice board and newspapers, they come to know about the activities.

3)   Maximum respondents agreed that literary events and sessions on career guidance are most important activities followed by computer classes and sessions on finance. Some respondents also favored book exhibition, cultural events, children's programs and events to engage common people as most liked activities.

4)   Out of 100 users, 81 users said that they are satisfied with the organisation of such activities.

5)   68% users opined that these activities must be conducted on the holidays or during vacations, on Sundays and in the evening time so that maximum people can visit.

Conclusion:

Thus, the study highlighted the overall satisfaction of the end users regarding the community outreach activities conducted by the public libraries. The library staff and the authorities can use the findings to enhance the frequency of community outreach activities. They should try to arrange more and more sessions on the topics which are favored by the maximum users. Constant engagement of the users and the staff among each other through these activities will surely bridge the gap and increase the number of users in such libraries. This will further ensure the growth of these libraries in all the aspects by providing a momentum of progress.

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