What is Outcome Measurement?

Outcome measurement is a way for libraries to assess our true impact on the people we serve. No matter the size of the community or library, understanding our impact starts with library staff knowing the different types of measurement and what underlying questions they help us answer.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Needs Assessment</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Patron Satisfaction</th>
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<td><strong>Why it is important:</strong> Knowing what patrons need (and when those needs change) helps library staff plan services that are customized for their community. A needs assessment may include a patron survey about areas of service that should be expanded or reduced, or an internal analysis of physical resources or gaps that library staff already know about.</td>
<td><strong>Why it is important:</strong> An output is a measure of the volume or performance of a library’s actions, usually quantitative – like the number of materials created or delivered, people served, or services carried out.</td>
<td><strong>Why it is important:</strong> An outcome is a specific benefit that results from a library program or service. Outcomes can be quantitative or qualitative, and are often expressed as changes that individuals perceive in themselves – like new or improved knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior, or status.</td>
<td><strong>Why it is important:</strong> Patron perspectives on whether they get what they want from library services help libraries improve their offerings. Like a needs assessment, library staff can use surveys to learn how satisfied patrons are with the services provided.</td>
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| **Examples:**  
- Benchmarking activities  
- Strategic plan development exercises | **Examples:**  
- Library use  
- Program visits/attendance  
- Computer use  
- Circulation  
- Website traffic | **Examples:**  
- A job seeker feels more confident in writing a resume after a one-on-one meeting with library staff  
- After attending a Storytime program, a caregiver feels more knowledgeable about their children’s literacy needs and growth | **Examples:**  
- A survey asking patrons to rate from "excellent" to "poor" library services like library policies, facilities, Internet access, or hours of operation |
While each of these types of measurement is valuable for different reasons, measuring and understanding outcomes is particularly important for a number of reasons:

- **To better measure and improve our impact in the community we serve.** The services we provide are all intended to improve our patrons’ lives. Outcome measurement helps us demonstrate what we hear every day from our patrons: that library services make a difference in their lives.

- **To support planning and assessment over time.** Whether you are working toward a specific goal within your library’s strategic plan or are developing new long term plans, information about how your current services benefit patrons today is essential.

- **To help better manage services and resources.** We all have limited resources, so we need to ensure that the money and time we spend on a program or service is the best use of those resources. Without measuring the impact of our work, this is very difficult to gauge.

- **To demonstrate need for funding and other support.** Anecdotal evidence can help illustrate your library’s value, but libraries need more to attain resources. Adding outcome measurement data alongside anecdotal evidence and output data will strengthen your library’s reports and proposals and allow you to better advocate, providing library leaders with a more compelling case for continued or increased library funding.