

Collaborative Service in Public Libraries for Equal Information Access

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Abstract. The inequality of access to information is still experienced by several groups of people, for instance, those with disabilities, those living in rural areas, and people of lower socio-economic status. Public libraries as information centers that have the main role in providing access to information for the public of all sorts of people need to ensure that everyone can access information equally. Cooperation and collaboration with other communities and institutions other than other libraries can be a means for public libraries to create collaborative services that target specific groups of people with specific needs. In the emerging trends of information technology, libraries need to survive by creating innovation and providing better services. This study used a literature review as the method of study. This study aims to explore the needs and the ways for public libraries to create collaborative service by reviewing previous literature regarding collaborative service in various fields. The study is expected to benefit researchers and public librarians to take part to support equal access to information.

Keywords: Public libraries, information access, collaboration, collaborative service, library management.

1 Introduction

Libraries undoubtedly hold a crucial role in providing information for its community. Generally, libraries are differed due to several factors, namely its response to the type of materials the library holds, the information needs of various users, and the difference in the response of the subject specialties that include the scope and detail of the subject. Public library, in particular, holds a vital role in a nation's cultural and intellectual life as it is the only institution that provides publicly accessible information

(Sulistyo-Basuki, 1993). One of the missions of public libraries by IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022 stated that public libraries should “ensure access for all people to all sorts of community information and opportunities for community organizing, in recognition of the library’s role at the core of the social fabric”. Thus, public libraries should ensure that their information materials and services are delivered and accessible to the public of all sorts of people without any boundaries. However, the access to information is still very much an issue in many libraries, including public libraries around the world.

The issue regarding accessibility to information and libraries is closely related to people with disabilities. In addition to them, other particular groups of people face some problems in access to information and library materials. For instance, people who live in rural areas may not receive equal access to information compared to people who live in towns, as rural areas contain smaller populations that make it more difficult for public libraries to ensure that the residents of the area are able to access the same information services and documents (Toth, 2009). People in developing countries also struggle to receive proper access to information. Countries in Africa, for example, struggle to receive access to information because several barriers in infrastructure, economic, political, legal, cultural, institutional, as well as personal barriers. These limitations limit information at every stage, from its creation to its usage. Additionally, they also determine the packaging that holds the information (Kanyengo and Mufalo, 2008).

Disparity in information access also occurs in people with different levels of socio-economic status. The disparity occurs in the context of the amount of access to online resources, those with abundant access and those with little to no access. This phenomenon is also known as the “Digital Divide” that has literature of its own (NTIA, 1998 cited in Ayers and Liu, 2006). Many researchers conclude that many people are being left behind in the “information age” because they do not have access to information online. Other supporters argue that denial of such access will result in a widening of the social and economic divide between middle-class and lower-class Americans (McKissak 1998; Ratan 1995 cited in Ayers and Liu, 2006).

With many certain groups of people having to experience limited access to information due to varied and complex factors, public libraries as information provision centers aimed at providing information to the public of all sorts of people need to take into account strategies to tackle the problem. Providing services that are personalized based on the special needs of each group of people with their own limitations in accessing information is required to determine the way the services will be built and delivered. Cooperation and collaboration with other institutions to develop collaborative service can be a means for public libraries to bolster equal access to information. Therefore, several research questions are proposed: (1) Why is collaborative service in libraries important?; (2) How is the impact collaborative service in a variety of fields?; (3) How collaborative service can be implemented in public libraries to provide equal information access?

The objective of this study is to provide new knowledge that can be used to make public libraries more inclusive and capable of providing access to information to particular groups of people. The next section will explore the collaborative service efforts carried out in various fields and then explore the ways collaborative service can

be implemented in the context of information services in public libraries to tackle the inequality of access to information in several groups of people. Moreover, this paper is expected to be useful for researchers and librarians, specifically public library librarians with greater attention to support equal access to information.

2 Method

This study used a qualitative method based on a literature review from previous research related to collaborative service in a variety of fields. The literature review is used in this paper to explore collaborative service efforts conducted in a variety of fields from several scientific publications and propose a method from the literature that can be used for public libraries to develop collaborative service. The previous studies used in this study are derived from journal articles and proceedings available online and offline. The studies are not limited to a certain period, but the studies are used according to the relation and relevancy of the study to the problem discussed in this paper.

3 Defining Collaborative Service

Castaner and Oliveira (2020) in their research revisited the definitions of the terms coordination, cooperation, and collaboration. Gulati et al (2012) in Castaner and Oliver (2020) defined coordination as the orderly and deliberate adjustment or alignment of actions taken by partners to to achieve mutually defined goals. They also give a definition of cooperation as the joint pursuit of agreed goals in a way that is compatible with a shared understanding of outcomes and contributions while collaboration they define as a combination of coordination and cooperation between alliance partners. Salvato et al review the definitions of these terms in terms of Latin etymology. Coordination comes from the Latin *cum ordinare* which means to organize, to put in order, to arrange, with others. Castener and Oliveira state that this definition is helpful because it emphasizes a particular type of joint action, namely organizing. Cooperation comes from *cum operare* which means doing something/operating with others while collaboration comes from the Latin *cum labo rare* which means working together with others.

Their research led to several conclusions regarding the definitions of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration. The research proposes to define coordination as the attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes of setting common goals. Cooperation refers to the attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes of implementing those goals as agreed. Collaboration refers to voluntarily helping others to achieve the goal of setting common goals of inter-organizational relationships or personal goals. Collaboration refers to helping others voluntarily to achieve the goals of a shared inter-organizational relationship or personal goals. This research's conceptual proposal brings a nuanced view of potential partners' goals and behaviors in interorganizational relationships by adding (1) personal altruistic goals to (2) personal selfish goals - sometimes even opportunistic, i.e. detrimental to other partners - as well as (3) shared or collective goals. Thus, Collaboration between organizations is the basis for collaborative service. A

collaborative service encourages group collaboration by giving users access to combined resources (Thanh, Jørstad, and Dustdar, 2009). Collaborative service in libraries allows librarians to utilize resources from the other organization as the result of collaboration between both parties. Therefore, libraries will be able to easily deliver services that are specifically created for the group of people with special needs to access information.

4 The Increasing Needs of Collaborative Service in Library

The development of information and communication technology has a significant influence on various aspects of human life, from social, cultural, educational, economic, and political. In the field of education, libraries have an important role to support the teaching and learning process in schools, universities, and support lifelong learning in general. Information and communication technology has significantly transformed libraries in terms of services, collections, functions, and systems. To keep up with the rapidly changing society and its changing information needs, librarians need to be ready to adapt and provide services that meet the needs of users. With the advancement of information and communication technology, librarians also benefit from the convenience offered by information and communication technology in terms of establishing cooperative and collaborative relationships with other parties. Not only inter-library collaboration, but libraries need to start looking at the possibility of cooperating and collaborating with other institutions to produce collaborative services. It is important for a library to establish cooperation and collaboration with other institutions to reach wider and more diverse information users with specific needs.

Castells (2010) stated that networks are the right instrument for a capitalist economy based on innovation, globalization, and decentralized concentration, for jobs, workers, and institutions based on flexibility and adaptability. In this increasingly dynamic era, a library is an institution that is required to be flexible and quickly adapt to the needs of the community to compete and exist amid the onslaught of information technology development. Therefore, cooperation and collaboration between libraries and other institutions to create a collaborative service that reaches more diverse users with their particular needs can be a means for libraries to adapt to this fast-changing time.

5 Collaborative Service Efforts

Several studies discuss the implementation of collaborative service in the field of social work. For instance, Aritonang, Suharna, and Hekmatyar (2023) examined the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative social service models in helping those in West Java who are experiencing social problems. The parties that are involved in this model are social institutions, local governments, and the communities and the public in dealing with social problems that occurred in the area. The forms of the collaboration carried out are exchanging data and information, coordinating services, as well as developing joint activities and programs. The models include Integrated Social Service Center (PLST) that is a center where a variety of social services are offered to those

with social issues. PLST serves as a coordinating center and facilitator to offer the community integrated social services that are quick, precise, and comprehensive. PLST collaborates with other social and governmental organizations as well to offer more comprehensive and integrated services. Moreover, a system called the Social Service Network (JLS) makes it easier for different social care providers in West Java to collaborate and coordinate. In order to address social issues, JLS brings together a number of stakeholders, including local governments, social institutions, communities, and the general public. The West Java social services network is an integrated system of businesses, institutions, and people who cooperate to offer social services to those in need. Governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), religious institutions, and other stakeholders are all part of the network. The result of this study showed positive results in raising the quality and efficacy of social assistance given to those with social issues.

The effectiveness of collaborative service is also found in another study in the field of social work. The study analyzed the effects of collaborative services provided by Allegheny County Jail Collaborative (ACJC). The ACJ is a detention and prison facility that offers "lock-up" services to people who have been arrested while they are being detained for formal identification by the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Criminal Identification and pre-arraignment hearings before district justice. The services include collaboration-based-in-jail services as well as post release transitional services. The services provided by ACJC can be in the forms of computer literacy, creative writing and publishing, drug and alcohol education and treatment, parenting skills, vocational training, life skills, and stress and anger management. The outcomes included a much lower recidivism rate among convicted participants, similar service advantages across racial groups, and a significant proportion of participants successfully reintegrating into community life (Yamatani & Spjeldnes, 2011).

Another study in the field of education mainly discussed collaborative service for students with disabilities. The study carried out by Campbell and Skarakis-Doyle (2007), for instance, explores a framework for collaborative service delivery for school-aged children with SLI (specific language impairment). The framework analyzed is The World Health Organization's (2001) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). ICF is utilized as an organizational and conceptual framework for considering how knowledge of commonalities across developmental disabilities may be used to promote collaborative service delivery in an educational setting. SLPs (speech-language pathologists) and other members of the school-based team may be better able to mobilize professional resources with this organizational framework in place. The concept offered here provides a continuum of methods in which consideration is given to what aspects of SLI and its related difficulties may be treated globally, what aspects can be treated often, and what aspects need to be treated selectively. It opens the door for collaborations between researchers, clinicians, and policymakers to empirically evaluate these concepts and strengthen the evidence base in clinical practice by presenting this framework for collaborative school-based service delivery.

Collaborative service delivery is also explored in governmental organizations to achieve high quality with less expensive service delivery in their communities. The

result of the study suggests that for certain local governments, such service delivery partnerships can result in tangible benefits. If done right, collaborations offer the chance for cost savings, improved service quality and effectiveness, and additional technical skills/expertise that the government cannot provide on its own. The collaborative service can be in many forms, such as single-service outsourcing, extensive public-private partnerships, and small- and regional-scale alliances with other public sector organizations at various levels of government (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013).

6 Collaborative Service in Public Libraries

Collaborative service has been found to have positive outcomes in several fields as mentioned in the previous chapter. Public libraries might as well implement similar strategies to create innovative and effective services through collaboration with other parties and institutions. Kadel and Routh (1993) developed 8 stages that provide practical guidelines for collaborative efforts in the field of education that can be used as well as the basis for developing collaborative services in public libraries to target those with limited information access. The stages can be repeated, overlap, or occur in different order based on the collaborator's goals and expanding efforts.

1. Getting started

A collaborative service initiative usually starts when a single person or small group realizes that collaboration is necessary to improve services for the community it serves, conceives of different solutions, believes that the community's climate is suitable for such a collaboration, and thinks success is achievable. This initiation can come from librarians, library staff, government mandate, or even users through their feedback.

2. Developing a community collaborative council

The creation of a community collaborative council and the arrangement of its initial meetings are the first responsibilities assigned to the collaboration initiators. This council should be made up of a variety of interested parties and parties who are involved. Additionally, it is critical to gain the support of influential community leaders, whose judgment and conviction will be crucial during planning and implementation. In the context of a public library, librarians might be the initiators and the leaders who are in charge of the council. To establish which service agencies should be involved initially and to discuss the perceived essential needs of the particular group of individuals, initiators may want to have one-on-one meetings with the involved parties. Librarians may find it easier to start with a small council and a constrained range of services with the intention of growing it later on. Nevertheless, it is crucial to include practitioners—those who will actually deliver the integrated services—no matter the council's size. Their opinions, trust, and a sense of ownership will be necessary for the implementation to be effective. The practitioners can be librarians and other library staff as well as those from the community or institutions in the council.

3. *Identifying a shared vision and goals*

The librarians as the initiators' first responsibility is to reach a consensus on a vision for integrated services and the objectives of a joint endeavor. To justify time spent on the council's activities, participants will require specific attention early in the process. This stage is crucial because to make changes and improvements in the middle of the collaborative creation and implementation, collaborators are getting ready to assess their progress. Setting short- and long-term goals will lead to discussions about program assessment and financing accountability requirements, preparing the council for later stages.

4. *Conducting a needs assessment*

Early in the collaborative process, a needs assessment should be carried out, and it should be conducted again frequently for the duration of the program. As needs evolve throughout time, so will the communities and institutions most suited to meet the needs, as well as the resources and staff available. The group of people who are the target of the service should be specifically asked to identify and define their own needs because they are the best people to do so. Libraries can reach out to them and conduct a survey or interview to find out their needs.

5. *Developing a plan of action*

This stage aims to create strategies to reach the goals set in the previous stage. Developing a plan of action for the service will need to take into account some considerations, including determining facilities and tools required to execute the service, establishing the target of the service that involves a group of people with limited access to information, assigning responsibilities for each of the librarians and staff, and arranging funding plan.

6. *Implementing the plan*

After the collaborators have created a collaborative strategy, they should think about the best ways to notify the public and enlist the group of people who require the services. Those in charge from other parties that contribute to the service might as well be the ones who have a crucial role in implementing the plan. They might be the ones who connect the library with the targeted group.

7. *Evaluation*

A plan that involves collaboration will need to be reviewed. While the collaboration is being established, plans for evaluation should be made. Outcome measures should be related to initial goals, data from the needs assessment may be compared to the outcomes, and some data collecting may require maintaining records throughout development and implementation. If the project was successful in achieving its aims, as well as the reasons why it was or was not effective, are both examined in a thorough evaluation. Early improvement or even shortcomings can be recognized if the

collaborators have established short- and long-term goals, so then the shortcomings can be evaluated and corrected as soon as possible.

8. *Planning for improvements*

The collaborative council will need to decide how to better or adjust the collaboration based on the evaluation's findings. Improvement can take the form of correcting any shortcoming that occurs, maintaining the things that have been on a good path, or improving the service by, for example, expanding the number of the targeted group of people.

Recent research by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015) explored the theoretical framework of collaboration in the field of public management. The study aims to assist integrative leaders and public managers in various sectors to design and maintain effective cross-sector collaborations when these endeavors have the potential to benefit the public. The framework discussed in the study can be used by librarians of public libraries as they serve the same objective: to create public value. Librarians of public libraries can take into consideration the collaborative processes discussed in the framework to help them develop collaborative service.

1. *Trust and commitment*

Trust between individuals and institutions involved is the core of collaboration works. This process is related to the first, second, and third guides of Kadel and Routh's (1993) collaborative service development guideline. Building trust can be achieved when collaborators are confident with each other's competency, common values, good intentions, sharing resources and information, and serving each other's interests. These can be acquired within a collaborative council and identifying a shared vision and mission within it.

2. *Communication*

Communication is the most important process of building collaborative service. Communication serves as a tool to negotiate and construct the collaboration work. This process is applied in every stage of Kadel and Routh's (1993) collaborative service development guideline.

3. *Legitimacy*

External and internal legitimacy is crucial, thus external parties and collaborators within the collaborative council should see the collaboration as a legitimate entity in terms of its interactions and structure. Internal legitimacy is important because it relates to developing the commitment of the collaborators.

4. *Collaborative planning*

There are 2 approaches to planning according to Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (2009) cited from Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015), namely deliberate and emergent planning. Deliberate planning occurs by articulating goals, mission, objectives, roles, steps, and implementation while emergent planning occurs when understanding of goals, mission, objectives, roles, steps, and implementation occurs throughout the collaboration. In Kadel and Routh's (1993) collaborative service development guideline, this process relates to the fourth until the eighth stage. The prominent relation may show in the fourth and fifth stages (needs assessment and developing a plan of action) while also in the implementation of the plan. Changes and problems throughout the collaboration process might occur so it is crucial to evaluate the service and make plans to improve the service according to the evaluation and feedback.

Conclusion

The inequality of access to information is still haunting many groups of people. Public libraries as information centers that are accessible to the public of all sorts of people should take the role in reducing this problem by providing services that are created specifically to those groups of people by creating collaborative service. The need to collaborate is increasingly important nowadays as information technology may take over the role of libraries. Collaborative service efforts in several fields, such as social work, education, and government institutions, have shown positive outcomes. Public libraries should take into consideration ways to build collaborative services that can be impactful for the targeted group of people with limited access to information. Several stages based on Kadel and Routh (1993)'s 8 stages to develop collaborative services in the context of education can be implemented in public libraries to develop collaborative service. The 8 stages include what needs to be done to start (*getting started*), *developing a community collaborative council*, *identifying a shared vision and goals*, *conducting a needs assessment*, *developing a plan of action*, *implementing the plan*, *evaluation*, and *planning for improvements*. The guidance is also supported by the process of cross-sector collaboration, namely trust and commitment, communication, legitimacy, and collaborative planning. By creating and delivering collaborative service and developing it based on the mentioned stages, it is hoped that public libraries can more easily engage and reach as well as provide the service that suits the specific needs of the group of people with limited access to information and eventually eradicate the inequality of access to information in general.

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