Research Article

Developing a Library Association Membership Survey: Challenges and Promising Themes

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Abstract

Objective – Many of us involved in the library and information sector are members of associations that represent the interests of our profession. These associations are often key to enabling us to provide evidence based practice by offering opportunities such as professional development. We invest resources in membership so we must be able to inform those in charge about our needs, expectations, and level of satisfaction. Governing bodies and committees, therefore, need a method to capture these views and plan strategy accordingly. The committee of the Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) of the Library Association of Ireland wanted to enable members to give their views on the group, to understand what aspects of a library association are important to librarians in Ireland, and to learn about the reasons for and against membership.

Methods – Surveys are a useful way of obtaining evidence to inform policy and practice. Although relatively quick to produce, their design and dissemination can pose challenges. The HSLG committee developed an online survey questionnaire for members and non-members (anyone eligible to join our library association). We primarily used multiple choice, matrix, and contextual/demographic questions, with skip logic enabling choices of relevance to respondents. Our literature review provided guidance in questionnaire design and suggested four themes that
we used to develop options and to analyse results.

Results – The survey was made available for two weeks and we received 49 eligible responses. Analysis of results and reflection on the process suggested aspects that we would change in terms of the language used in our questionnaire and dissemination methods. There were also aspects that show good potential, including the four themes that were used to understand what matters to members: expertise (professional development), community (connecting and engaging), profession (sustaining and strengthening), and support (financial and organizational supports). Overall, our survey provided rich data that met our objectives.

Conclusion – It is essential that those who are governing any group make evidence based decisions, and a well-planned survey can support this. Our article outlines the elements of our questionnaire and process that didn’t work, and those that show promise. We hope that lessons learned will help anyone planning a survey, particularly associations who wish to ascertain the views of their members and others who are eligible to join. With some proposed modifications, our questionnaire could provide a template for future study in this area.

Introduction

Library associations are professional organizations formed to bring together those involved in library-related work who share common interests in subjects, types of services, or other factors, such as geographical location (Librarianship Studies & Information Technology, 2020). At the local, national, regional, and international levels they play an important role in the development of subject fields; provide opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge, and a platform for discussion; unite and give voice to professionals; and keep members up to date with new developments (Dowling & Fiels, 2009). To be successful, library associations need to fulfill the goals and expectations of their members, so it is crucial that those managing association strategy and making decisions understand these factors.

The Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) has been a special interest group of the Library Association of Ireland since 1982, with a recent average of about 50 members. We have an annual conference, annual general meeting, virtual journal club, email discussion list, e-newsletter, website, and hold regular continuing professional development (CPD) and networking events. The committee manages governance and activities on behalf of members. To meet expectations, we needed to obtain their views on the resources and services provided by the group, the aspects that are most important to them, and their reasons for membership. We also wanted to understand why some health librarians in Ireland are not members of our group. We conducted a literature search and developed an online survey that was made available in November 2021.

Literature Review

A search of ProQuest Library Science database in September 2021 using the term “library association” gave a useful overview of available literature. This was followed by checking of reference lists, and a search of library association websites. Two aspects were of particular interest: the questions used in past survey studies and the themes that emerged from texts. Four identified themes related to what members may expect to contribute and receive through association membership: (1) expertise - professional
development, (2) community - connecting and engaging, (3) profession - sustaining and strengthening, (4) support - financial and organizational supports.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals’ (n.d.-c) five-year action plan has four value propositions—community, expertise, representation, and recognition—that are similar to our first three themes. Although “support” may be subsumed within the other themes, for the purpose of examining membership, keeping it separate is useful for highlighting potential barriers or facilitators to joining or engaging in an association.

Themes were identified in a range of articles. Some were descriptive commentaries or desk research about the value of library associations (Broady-Preston, 2006; Chase, 2019; DiMauro, 2011; Joint, 2007; Lumpkin, 2016; Morrison, 2004; Wise, 2012). Other articles involved primary research, including studies that indirectly referenced the role of library associations, such as Corcoran & McGuinness (2014) who interviewed academic librarians about CPD, and studies that directly researched the subject. For example, in their 2020 study, Garrison and Cramer (2021) received 140 complete responses when surveying business librarians about what they wanted from their professional associations. Henczel (2014) used a phenomenological approach to study the impact of library associations. She conducted 52 semi-structured interviews with members of national library associations, providing a wealth of information. Spaulding & Maloney (2017) also looked at impact, asking how belonging to and participating in a professional association as a student impacted careers. They reported on 1,869 responses from their online survey. Frank (1997) conducted focus groups on the value of being active in professional organizations. In the same year, Kamm (1997) received 116 responses to her U.S. survey on how members make decisions about their library association.

**Identified Themes Related to Library Association Membership**

**Expertise - Professional Development**

One of the common themes in the literature on library associations is the provision of continuing professional development (CPD), including access to training and skills building through attendance at courses, workshops, conferences, and webinars (Henczel, 2016b). New knowledge, competencies, and skills gained through this CPD were viewed as a means of boosting resumes (Schwartz, 2016). While active participation in associations demonstrated engagement, leading to career enhancement (Frank, 1997; Garrison & Cramer, 2021; Spaulding & Maloney, 2017) and opportunities for research and publication (Chase, 2019; Wise, 2012). Lachance (2006) remarked that “No library association can survive, sustain, grow, or remain relevant in the modern age if it does not address members’ educational needs and provide innovative learning solutions that lower barriers to access” (p. 9).

Most associations facilitate professional accreditation pathways that encourage CPD and provide specialist professional competency standards to guide learning. Henczel (2014) found that professional registration was regarded by her study participants as a reason for joining associations, retaining membership, and becoming more participative in association activities. Registration and certification are available through associations such as the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), CILIP (UK), and the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA). These schemes list multiple benefits for participation, including increasing the standing of the profession, recognising professional excellence and CPD, and providing a mechanism for employers to coach and develop staff (LIANZA, n.d.), increased status, earnings, and recognition of abilities, skills, and experience (CILIP, n.d.-
Changes in skills and competences also came about through participation in association activities (Henczel, 2014).

Community - Connecting and Engaging

Studies frequently report it is important for those involved in the library or information sector to have opportunities to connect through networking and collaboration (Davidson & Middleton, 2006; Frank, 1997; Kamm, 1997; Sauceda, 2018; Spaulding & Maloney, 2017). Garrison & Cramer (2021) described networking as vital, saying that healthy organizations must provide ample opportunity for members to share experiences (good and bad), insights, suggestions, and to build friendships and have fun. They assert that library associations should support members through sharing expertise, connecting members in various roles, and “creating a network of supportive colleagues and mentorship” (p. 35).

Specific groups of people have been identified as sometimes needing more support in their practice. The ability to participate in an informal network of colleagues can be of enormous benefit, especially for solo or specialist librarians according to Chase (2019). Bradley et al. (2009) contended that new professionals can benefit from simply observing and interacting with colleagues, and seeing their peers being treated with professional respect. Associations have been found to make a difference through their support of members moving across sectors, students and new graduates, those in non-traditional roles, living in rural or geographically isolated areas, and those nearing retirement (Henczel, 2014). As Spaulding and Maloney (2017) assert, we need to connect with people through transitions.

Profession - Sustaining and Strengthening

Progress and cohesiveness within our profession is being achieved by setting and monitoring of global values and professional standards, accrediting courses and curricula, active recruitment, and disseminating research and professional information that will enhance our reputation as a profession (Agee & Lillard, 2005). Henczel’s (2016a, 2016b) major thesis considers library association impact on individuals, employers, and the profession. Her research concluded that five perceived impacts related to the profession: social inclusion and cohesion, information and education, promotion of the profession, and the sustainability of the profession. Although much of the literature on the value of associations is based on the personal attitudes of members, some associations have produced literature to demonstrate their impact. For example, researchers Streatfield and Markless (2019) have worked closely with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to evaluate the impact of its international programs: Freedom of Access to Information, International Advocacy Programme, and Building Strong Library Associations. The latter program, in turn, focused on helping associations build capacity and meet their goals (IFLA, 2016a).

Beyond the specific knowledge required to practice, librarians have acknowledged the benefits of being aware of what is happening in the profession and preserving our professional cultural heritage for future generations (Henczel, 2014). The altruistic view of contributing to our profession is mentioned throughout the literature (Chase, 2019), with many seeing membership as an obligation or “the right thing to do” (Kamm, 1997, p. 299) and a way of “giving back to the profession” (Henczel, 2014, p. 131). Library associations have also been described as a forum to champion our values, such as open access to information (Morrison, 2004).

Political action, particularly lobbying, has been cited as an important role of our associations (Agee & Lillard, 2005; Kamm, 1997). Some librarians have expressed the importance of having a single, united,
and strong representative voice (Henczel, 2014). Ahmadian Yazdi and Deshpande (2013) viewed it as essential for professionals “to meet and plan their activities to safeguard and promote the interests of their particular profession” (p. 92).

Support - Financial and Organizational Supports

A fourth theme that was seen as potentially important in relation to library association membership related to costs and employer support. Some associations, such as the American Library Association, have reported declining membership (ALA, 2020). One of the main concerns, or reasons for non-membership, has been cited as cost (Frank, 1997; Kamm, 1997). Although financial incentives in terms of grants and member discounts were referred to as a frustration when access is limited (Garrison & Cramer, 2021), it has also been suggested as a positive reason for joining (Schwartz, 2016). The extent of employer support of their activities, either by paying dues or expenses for conferences and meetings, has also been cited as an important factor in the selection of an association (Kamm, 1997).

Barriers to participating in CPD include time, financial costs, and lack of support from employers (Thomas et al., 2010). Corcoran & McGuinness (2014) have suggested that professional library organizations must be innovative and consider incentives to participate that resonate with members. This theme of “support,” therefore, involves some of the practical barriers and facilitators to membership that associations must consider.

Aims

We began with an iterative process that involved the setting of our aim and objectives, a literature search to assess what was known about the subject, and a review of emerging themes. The HSLG committee want to retain current members but also to understand why some of those involved in relevant positions have never joined or have left us. The overall purpose, therefore, was to enable evidence informed decisions by the committee leading to a strategy based on the views and needs of members and that tackles potential barriers to membership. We focused primarily on the views of those involved in health settings but also wanted to be guided by those from other sectors.

Survey aim: To gain insight into the issues of relevance to membership of our group and association.

Our objectives were to

1. enable HSLG members to give their views on the group,
2. understand what aspects of a library association are important to librarians in Ireland, and
3. learn about reasons for and against membership.

Methods

Questionnaire Design

A survey is a quick way of gathering data and allows everyone in a defined population to contribute. Online survey providers enable easy creation of various question types and answer options (Ball, 2019; Nayak & Narayan, 2019). For a cost, there are also advanced features such as skip logic (questions offered
depend on the previous answers so participants skip irrelevant questions) and crosstab analysis (useful when comparing the answers of participant sub-groups).

However, self-completed surveys do not generally allow for in-depth interrogation or clarification of answers. The wording of questions may also be interpreted differently by participants (particularly if care is not taken during design; French, 2012). Where time and costs allow, a qualitative method such as focus groups or interviews would provide additional data and real-life examples to improve understanding (Granikov et al., 2020).

In line with good questionnaire design, we only included a question if it could provide important context or useful application (the answers could enable action; National Care Experience Programme, n.d.). For example, new librarians have been identified as potentially having different views and needs to others (Chase, 2019; Joint, 2007); therefore, a question on length of service was warranted. The number of questions asked depended on the association membership status of participants. Questionnaires with more items tend to have a lower return rate (French, 2012), so we asked most questions of those who belonged to our group, as they may be more invested and receive the greatest benefit from providing responses. No personal data (such as age) were necessary.

To facilitate skip logic and analysis by population, we organized our questionnaire into sections. Section 1, which was answered by everyone, contained contextual questions based largely on the four variables used by Henzcel (2016) in her study on library association impact: association, sector affiliation, career stage, and activity levels. This included information on the work or study status of participants, how long they had worked in the sector, whether they received financial support to join a library association or attend events, whether they had ever been on a committee, and their association membership status. The latter (Q7, Table 1) was primarily used to direct respondents to further questions. (See Appendix A for survey instrument.)

Table 1
Survey Skip Logic Questionnaire Flow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q7. Please tick the most appropriate option for you:</th>
<th>If yes, then directed to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am a HSLG member</td>
<td>Sections 2 and 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am a Library Association of Ireland member (but not the HSLG)</td>
<td>Section 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I belong to another professional library association, instead of the Library Association of Ireland</td>
<td>Sections 4 and 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am a former library association member</td>
<td>Section 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have never belonged to a library association</td>
<td>Section 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 3 asked why someone working in a health setting was not a member of the HSLG. This required additional skip logic in Question 1.

Closed questions, with options provided, were primarily used for ease and speed of completion, but in case options were not exhaustive, “other, please specify” and open questions were added where appropriate. Choices were listed alphabetically to prevent researcher bias in terms of order. Only Question 1 (on eligibility and status) and 7 (required for skip logic) were mandatory. Evaluative questions provide a baseline measure and an opportunity for governing committees to review areas that are working and those that need improvement. These questions can be asked at regular intervals to monitor progress. Therefore, we asked participants to rate the value they place on membership, how well we are currently meeting their needs and expectations, and to identify gaps in services. Wording of these
questions and the options provided were inspired by those used in previous library association survey studies (Garrison & Cramer, 2021; Henczel, 2016a; IFLA, 2016b). However, to make items salient to our members and to meet our objectives we developed our own survey tool.

**Questionnaire Testing**

Questionnaires require testing to assess reliability and validity of questions. Reliability refers to how well data can be reproduced, with a reliable survey resulting in consistent information. Validity is how well a questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure, with a valid survey producing accurate information (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998; Meadows, 2003). Both can be obtained by ensuring that definitions and models used to select questions are grounded in theory or experience (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998, p. 6), thus underpinning the importance of the literature review and researcher discussions.

Using skip-logic requires additional time for testing as each potential option needs to be followed to ensure appropriate flow. One HSLG committee member devised the questionnaire and the other five members previewed and filled it in multiple times to check that questions and answer options were appropriate, comprehensive, and made sense (face and content validity).

**Survey Dissemination**

We made the survey available online in the first two weeks of November 2021 and sent the link via our group membership list (49 recipients), discussion email list (85 recipients, including members and non-members working in health librarianship), the library association newsletter (approximately 570 personal members), our website, and via three invitations to participate from our Twitter account. As an incentive, and a means of thanking participants, we offered eligible respondents the chance to enter a draw for a €50 voucher. To ensure that responses remained anonymous, we set up a separate survey for the draw. Those who wanted to participate could click on, or copy, a link to the draw survey and enter their email address at any time during a three-week period. Researchers were only allowed access to the one survey to which they were assigned, which also ensured that results could not be connected to individuals.

**Results**

We had 49 valid responses: 21 HSLG members (response rate of 46% for the group), 21 other library association members, and 7 non-members of an association (including 6 former members). Just two participants worked as an information professional for 0–5 years (4%), 12 (25%) worked 6–11 years, and 35 (71%) worked 12 or more years. As this article focuses on the development of our survey, we primarily present results that highlight issues of importance to design.

To learn about current financial supports, we asked if respondents’ organizations or libraries paid towards membership or attendance at CPD events and courses. Considerably more of them paid towards CPD than membership (Figure 1).
Having developed new question options, it is usual to look for assurance that these are appropriate and comprehensive. Our four themes were useful in setting and analysing two core questions. We asked participants for up to three reasons for their membership, or non-membership, of a library association, then we asked them to rate the importance of 20 options related to membership. Asking the open question first allowed participants to provide answers that occurred to them instinctively (before viewing researcher-defined choices).

Forty respondents provided one or more reasons why they were a member of a library association (Table 2). For non-members, six respondents gave at least one reason why they were not a member. It is difficult to draw conclusions from the small number of responses; however, there appears to be a feeling of disconnect among some of those who are not members of a library association. They were also more unsure of the benefits (see Appendix B for responses).

Table 2
Number of Reasons For or Against Library Association Membership by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Members (n=40)</th>
<th>Non-members (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents could give up to three reasons. (From survey questions 14 & 21.)

Figure 2 provides results on the importance of membership factors for association-member respondents, coded by theme. All five options for the theme community were in the top half of results and the five options for support were in the lower half. In Figure 3, results from non-members show the themes are spread more evenly. Again, note the low number of respondents, which restricts our ability to use statistical analysis and to generalize results.
Figure 2
The importance of factors in terms of membership in a library association. All members, n=40.
(From survey question 17.)

Figure 3
The importance of factors in terms of membership of a library association. Non-members, n=6.
(From survey question 21.)
These results show that there is consistency in responses across our two core questions. For both members and non-members, the reasons for and against membership mirror the subsequent responses for what is important, which provides some confidence in internal consistency for this aspect of the questionnaire. To further check for reliability, we can examine results by subgroup. We might expect more similarity among member subgroups compared to non-members.

Looking at the importance of themes, dividing members into HSLG members and non-HSLG association members shows similarity, and these differ from non-members (Figure 4). To visually compare the themes across groups we used the NHS Survey Programme partial credit scoring system that allows data relating to a question’s options to be summarized by a single number (Care Quality Commission, 2015). The most positive answer option (very important) is scored as 10 and the least positive (not important) is 0. Intermediate answer options are scored with intermediate values (somewhat important is scored 5). Calculations are then made based on the number of responses. The method has been tested and enables organizational performance on a survey question to be summarized and, when required, compared across organizations.

![Figure 4](image)

Figure 4
Themes ranked by importance and by library association member-status.
(From survey questions 17 & 21.)

Although not tested for significance, a simple visual examination of results within and across the results of core questions show what we might expect from a reliable questionnaire. Factor analysis and significance testing would be useful to confirm these findings. The option of “other” was very rarely used in the survey, which gives us some confidence that we didn’t exclude important options in our questions. This suggests reasonable content validity.

**Discussion**

Despite obtaining a relatively small number of responses, our questionnaire performed as expected and enabled us to meet our aim and objectives. We now have a much better understanding of what is
important to members and can use this knowledge for planning. In particular, by identifying themes, we understand that our association group members want to be part of a community where they can engage with others as much as they want educational activity. We have already begun to develop a CPD framework that incorporates a more structured approach, but which also focuses on connecting and engaging members.

We learned that financial concerns were not particularly prevalent among members, though it would be interesting to know if this only applied to our respondents. One may speculate that those who take time to complete a survey are more invested and active than others. Financial considerations may be more prevalent among those who do not belong to a library association. Knowing that most respondents did not have financial support to join an association but did have support to attend events has implications for those deciding on costs. If this is true of the wider library and information service population, it would suggest the importance of keeping costs of joining associations low and recouping costs through events, which are more likely to be subsidized. Keeping questions related to financial support is therefore recommended in follow-up surveys.

**Defining Our Target Population**

The language used in surveys is crucial as it determines how results can be interpreted. A challenge in this survey involved defining our population. There were three main cohorts of interest: those involved in library and information services based in Ireland who were (1) HSLG members, (2) other members of library associations, and (3) non-members (former association members or never joined).

Membership in a library association is generally open to a range of people. In Ireland, this includes those with or without a professional library qualification who are or have been employed in the field of librarianship; those enrolled on a course leading to a professional qualification in library and information studies; and those with an interest in the work, welfare, and progress of libraries, but who are not employed in the field (Library Association of Ireland, 2012). Similarly, the American Library Association (2021) allows a broad spectrum of membership, which is open to “individuals, organizations, and nonprofits, and businesses interested in working together to change the world for the better through libraries and librarians.” And, in the UK professional association, CILIP, individual membership is “open to everyone working in knowledge, information, data or librarianship” (CILIP, n.d.-b); with those not working in these areas still eligible to join as non-practitioners (CILIP, n.d.-d). Most associations allow personal and organizational membership.

An openly available online survey needs to clearly describe eligibility to ensure you reach those who you want to include, that you avoid wasting the time of those who you want to exclude, and ultimately, that you get meaningful results. Association members may be easily identified through membership lists, but identifying and targeting non-members is difficult. If repeating our survey, we would make significant changes to the language used in our introduction, our questions, and dissemination.

Question 1 established the work or study status of respondents. Although not intentional, use of the term “librarian / information specialist” in our introduction and in that question is likely to have made some eligible people feel excluded. There has been interest in finding a respectful and inclusive term for those who work in library settings who do not have an accredited professional qualification. “Library staff” was the term preferred by respondents in a recent survey aiming to find an agreeable term for staff in non-librarian roles (Schilperoort et al., 2021). However, it is difficult to find an encompassing title for those working outside traditional library settings. CILIP (n.d.-a) believes that “What makes someone a
professional is the knowledge, skills, attitude, behaviours and values that they bring to their work.” To acknowledge the wide-ranging roles and focus of the sector it seems advisable to avoid titles or labels in a survey.

In the future, we may define our population as all current members of our library association, and anyone else working, seeking work, retired from work, or studying for a qualification, in the library or information (knowledge, data) sector in Ireland. Although this excludes some non-members eligible to join associations, it does include the key groups primarily required for planning purposes. (See Appendix C for revised survey instrument.)

The options for question 1 could be the following:

- I am currently working in the library or information sector.
- I am currently seeking work in the library or information sector.
- I am currently studying on a course leading to a qualification in library or information studies.
- I have retired from work in the library or information sector.
- I am a member of a library association and have an interest in the work, welfare and progress of library and information services but have never been employed in the sector.

Follow-up questions may be required to establish eligibility or for contextual analysis:

- I am based in Ireland. Y/N
- I am working or seeking work in a health-related setting or where health is a significant component of my work. Y/N
- I have a professional library or information qualification. Y/N (if yes, please specify)

Each option needs to have a purpose. If results are going to be used for reporting and planning, then it is necessary to know the status of respondents. For example, the views of those working or seeking work in the sector may be prioritized when planning CPD and other events, and will provide the most meaningful data from non-members. Knowing the views of students will be important for future planning and recruitment. For a baseline survey, one may also want to check that the needs and expectations of specific groups, such as those with and without professionally accredited qualifications, are similar. If so, future surveys can omit any distinction. If they provide significantly different responses, then this may have implications for service provision.

Clear definitions and appropriate language should help attract those who want to participate in a survey. These are also important for meaningful analysis of responses. The purpose of the survey must guide decisions about who to include. For an openly available survey, which is required to capture non-member views, clear language around eligibility is especially important.

**Other Lessons and Limitations**

An obvious limitation to the interpretation of our results is the small number of respondents. The use of membership lists by groups and associations for dissemination would enable calculation of response rates. However, using a broad definition for our eligible population and a survey openly promoted through several sources, means that it was not possible to calculate response rates for everyone. Attracting participation of non-members would require a more structured approach; for example, contacting a sample of libraries and library schools. There are online listings of libraries by country and
sector, such as the IFLA (n.d.) library map of the world. Although often incomplete, they may be used to increase reach. Researchers must decide what is most important when reaching their goals: comprehensiveness (sensitivity) versus precision. Narrower definitions and routes may enable more precise and calculable data but also limit the diversity of responses.

Social media likes and retweets didn’t necessarily lead to participation, so this method of dissemination cannot be relied upon alone. Tagging key groups and individuals and adding a picture may increase interactions, but ensuring eligible populations view individual communications, such as a tweet, is unpredictable. Making the survey available for a longer period and sending the link directly to all association member lists should increase response rates.

Although the idea of offering a reward for completion is attractive, the openness of social media communication means that it may attract those who are not eligible to take part. In our case, following a tweet that mentioned the draw, we received several (52) inappropriate responses which had to be removed. To ensure transparency, two researchers independently reviewed the spreadsheet of results and highlighted those deemed to be ineligible based on content of answers (such as repeated or inappropriate phrases). Agreement was easily reached as the identified responses had been filled consecutively overnight. Ensuring inclusion of only valid responses is potentially a problem for all publicly available online surveys. We would not include a reward in the future.

Conclusion

Our research, including literature review and survey, provides us with information on which to plan strategy. We believe that our questionnaire could be adapted, with relevant elements utilized by other groups and associations. It is important that governing bodies and committees remember that our purpose is to guide and implement activity on behalf of members. We therefore need to understand how well we are doing, and how we should progress, based on the views of members. We also need to understand why people in our profession do not join any association so we can remove barriers and ensure benefits are appropriate, warranted, and clear. Six of the seven participants in our survey who weren’t current members were former members. If that represents a broader trend, then we also need to know why people leave their representative associations.

It is also useful for members, and potential members, to consider what they want and expect from their library association. A survey questionnaire can be a useful means of reminding respondents of the range of benefits that is available to them. Above all, it should be an impetus for action. Our updated questionnaire will be a suitable tool to evaluate how well we are meeting our members’ expectations and provide results that can act as a benchmark for progress. This valuable information will help us plan our activity, set goals, and maintain and grow membership. We are very grateful to those who took part in our survey as they have given us a clear direction and renewed purpose.

We have learned some useful lessons during the research process. Key points:

- Take time to define your population. Members of associations are easy to identify, but non-members (including former members, those who never joined, and those who may join in the future — such as students) will provide constructive insight into the value of an organization.
- Use language that is appropriate and inclusive. Some terms and titles may alienate potential contributors. It is important that those who you want to include know they are welcome to
participate. A clear description of eligibility in the survey introduction and in dissemination channels is required.

- Dissemination requires planning. Members can be reached directly through membership lists (enabling response rates to be calculated). Reaching non-members requires a targeted approach, which may involve an openly available survey that is promoted through a range of methods including social media and mailing lists, but should include a structured sampling of places where non-members work or study.
- The four themes identified through the literature and in this survey offer useful categories for assessment and planning.
- Decisions in relation to data collection tools should be based on what you want to achieve in the process.

Acknowledgements

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