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Listening to your community is a critical task – here are a few ways how

The library has an ongoing task to align its resources and services to community needs. At the 2014 Louisiana Library Association conference, Samantha Becker from the University of Washington Information School offered advice in her “Listening to your Patrons” presentation. It’s important to listen to the community to figure out areas for improvement. But what’s the best way?

Becker said to prepare for gathering data, the library should assemble a working team that may include library managers, board/Friends representatives, local government, and members of the public. Some of the questions this team might start asking include:

- What do you need to know?
- What are the most important issues facing your community?
- What do your community members need to have, know, or do to be successful?
- What kind of community do you aspire to be?
- What kinds of programs can meet community needs?
- How well do our programs meet community needs?
- Who aren't we serving as well as we could?
- What's going on in your community?
- What are your community goals?
- What information would help you make decisions about programs to support those goals?

Existing data can tell you who lives in your service area, what kind of lives they may lead, what they might need and how patrons are using the library. The Wyoming State Library has assembled many data sources [for both libraries and communities](#) and it also [offers data services](#) to Wyoming libraries. Additional quantitative information may be collected through [local community surveys](#), and qualitative information through community forums, focus groups and interviews.

The analysis stage should be approached systematically. Write up brief summaries and impressions from forums and focus groups. Categorize your findings, look for themes

and exceptions, and validate it using other methods. Be open to what you find – it is easy to become locked into your initial assumptions.

Two tools are currently available free of charge to Wyoming libraries – the patron [Impact Survey](#) and the internal [Edge Assessment](#). Sixteen Wyoming public libraries are currently signed up for Edge; deadline to sign up is April 30. The Impact Survey is free through October 2014. The State Library has a [brief fact sheet](#) on both these tools. For more information, or for any questions on library and community data, contact Susan Mark, WSL statistics librarian at susan.mark@wyo.gov or 307-777-5915.

Based on information compiled by Michael Golrick on his Thoughts from a Library Administrator blog. [See full article](#).

Sample library policies readily available from the Wyoming State Library

Setting policies is one of your primary duties as a library board member. Wyoming Statute 18-7-105 specifies that trustees are to “Prescribe rules and regulations for the establishment, organization, operation and use of the county library and library system.” The Wyoming State Library has just added additional policy resources to the [Wyoming Library Board Members’ Handbook web page](#).

Policy resources on the list:

- [WebJunction policies section](#)
- [Library Trustees Association of New York State policy database](#)
- [Sample public library policies, Mid-Hudson Library System](#)
- [Safe Harbor: Policies and Procedures for a Safe Library](#)
- [Sample trustee ethics policy from ALTAFF](#)

The State Library also has a helpful book in its collection: [The public library policy writer : a guidebook with model policies on CD-ROM](#) by Jeanette Larson and Herman Totten (New York : Neal-Schuman Publishers, c2008) that you may request by interlibrary loan.

Please always feel free to contact the Wyoming State Library’s [Library Development Office](#) if you have questions on policies or other issues of concern.

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