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Valuing Consortial Resources: A Framework for Assessment

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Presenter Information

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Valuing Consortial Resources: A Framework for Assessment

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Abstract

Grounded assessment begins with establishing the goals of an institution and its users, but there is an added layer of complexity in determining value at the consortial level, where individual institutions will naturally perceive the value of a particular resource differently. The shared resources of a consortium are also often diverse in both format and acquisition method. How should the relative value between e-books and streaming media be compared? Between leased and demand-driven acquisitions? Between open access and collaboratively owned models?

To answer these questions, VIVA, the academic library consortium of Virginia, formed the Value Metric Task Force (VMTF). This group, composed of representative members from each major type of VIVA institution, was charged with designing a framework for the coherent and holistic evaluation of shared resources. To ensure the development of metrics that were reflective of overarching consortial values, the task force determined the highest collection priorities for the consortium and then translated these into quantifiable variables.

These proceedings detail the work of this group and the resulting flexible framework that employs weighted variables such as program levels, usage statistics, cost-per-use, and member feedback into straightforward, effective value metrics. This framework enables a consistent approach to the evaluation of consortial resources and empowers VIVA members to articulate the value of shared resources for Virginia students.

Introduction

In the 2014–2016 biennium, the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA), which serves as the academic library consortium of the state, received a 5% budget reversion. This necessitated a close review of financial commitments and cancellation of several

key products. During this review, it became clear that the consortium needed to develop standardized evaluation criteria that could be applied when reviewing its resources. Further, because ongoing resource costs often include annual price increases, even if VIVA receives no new cuts, the consortium must continually consider which resources are sustainable. Critical to this process is the ability to evaluate and clearly articulate the value of VIVA's shared research resources.

Regardless of which strategies are employed to measure the perceived value of content, grounded assessment must begin with establishing the priorities and goals of the institution and its users. There is an added layer of complexity in determining value at the consortial level with its wide range of institutions and constituencies. All of VIVA's member institutions, for example, are part of the higher education ecosystem within Virginia and include both public and private institutions and range from large doctoral research institutions to small two-year community colleges. How these institutions perceive the value of a particular resource to their users will naturally be different.

Although the priorities of the consortium are multifaceted, at its core, VIVA's primary aim is to level the academic playing field in Virginia by

ensuring that all students and faculty across the Commonwealth have access to shared, high-quality library resources, regardless of the size or type of academic institution. A great deal of the consortium's focus is on purchasing e-resources cooperatively and negotiating on behalf of all member libraries for shared resources. VIVA also supports a variety of collaborative library projects and initiatives across the state through training, funding, and project management. The 72 member institutions include all 39 state colleges and universities (six doctoral universities, nine four-year institutions, and 24 community and two-year branch colleges), as well as 32 of the independent (private, nonprofit) institutions, and the Library of Virginia. VIVA targets projects and products that save member institutions both money and staff time by providing cooperative and cost-effective resources and services to reduce duplication of both collections and of individual institutional efforts.

VIVA's funding model includes central funding from the state's general assembly that goes to direct support of shared resources for public institutions. A much smaller amount from the state is used for the Pooled Funds program, which supports private institutions and requires matching funds. Member institution funds contributed for cost-shares and opt-ins make up the remainder of VIVA's budget. In all, approximately half of VIVA's funding comes from the state, and half comes directly from its members.

VIVA's shared resources are diverse in both format and in access models, with formats ranging from e-books (over 80,000), journals (50,000), databases (175), to streaming media (7500 videos), and more (2,000,000 additional reports, proceedings, and newspapers). Access and acquisition models also vary and include content that is leased, collaboratively owned, demand-driven, open-access, and evidence-based.

In the spring of 2016, to create a system that could be used to compare the relative value of its shared resources, while prioritizing the highest collection development priorities for the consortium and accounting for the diversity of materials and models, VIVA's collections committee formed the Value Metric Task Force (VMTF).

Process

Since the consortium's member types naturally value particular resources differently, the VMTF's job was to find a way to evaluate resources from the perspective of the consortium as a whole, while incorporating the specific concerns of members. Specifically, VIVA's collections committee charged the group to:

Design and apply a framework for the coherent and holistic evaluation of VIVA products. The task force will determine what the highest collection development priorities are for the consortium and examine how these can be translated into quantifiable values. The end result will be an assessment framework and value metric system for the evaluation of shared resources that are reflective of VIVA's overarching values.

Potential factors the collections committee wanted the task force to consider included relevance to programs, cost avoidance/list price discount, and usage. Usage factors could be further delineated to include total usage, usage by institution type, ratio of usage by top institution(s), and cost per use.

The VMTF itself was formed to include the four VIVA institution types: doctoral, comprehensive, two-year, and private institutions, as well as VIVA central staff. It was critical to the work of the group that stakeholders be reflective of the membership of the consortium, so no one voice outweighed another.

The group began its work by examining the priorities for the consortium from each institutional perspective, with each representative member reflecting on the priorities at their school. In one of the first full group meetings, the task force went more deeply into this process by conducting a persona exercise.¹ The primary modification of this exercise from its more traditional use within libraries was, instead of constructing student and faculty personas, developing personas from the perspective of the institution types and focusing on what their

¹ The persona exercise was modified from the persona development workshop highlighted in the Learning Space Toolkit: <http://learningspacetoolkit.org/needs-assessment/working-with-data/creating-personas-workshop-tool/>

priority needs were from the consortium. During this exercise, the task force discovered that over 40% of brainstormed priorities by persona type were priorities for all four institutional types, 30% were priorities for three institutional types, 9% for two institutional types, and only seven priorities were individual to a single institutional type.

Using the 40% of overlapping priorities identified during the persona exercise, the task force surveyed member institutions to understand how they valued different factors depending on the specific format. The results were very interesting. For all of VIVA resource types, the top two concerns for consortial resources were cost savings and alignment with curriculum; however, after that, the priorities diverged. For example, for e-books, the next highest top priority was digital rights management (DRM) restrictions versus databases, where the next highest priority was easy one-stop content delivery.

While the task force was developing and administering the survey, the group also completed a data inventory of all VIVA product types. This inventory enabled the task force to avoid “reinventing the wheel” for data collection. For each product type, the group asked a series of questions, including what data does VIVA already collect; does this data align with ways in which libraries measure value for users; and are there other factors which aren’t being collected that could help answer these questions? With the understanding that the sole fact that something was measurable was not a reason to measure it, the group focused on readily accessible data that could serve as a temperature taker for each identified priority. Factors examined included cost-per-use, ways in which broad appeal could be measured, state priorities and program levels, cost savings, protection from model changes, and more. It was important to the task force that member institutions be able to easily adapt the results of the group’s work for use at the local level, so to this end, the group focused on what was measurable, attainable, and easy to implement.

The VMTF then used the results of the survey and the data inventory to prioritize metrics by format, with curricular alignment and cost weighted the same across format type, since those two factors were the top priorities for every format. The task force also included some specific metrics that the collections committee had determined were top consortial

“value” priorities, such as giving weight to such factors as open access models, independent publishers, COUNTER compliant usage statistics, and vendor responsiveness. The metrics and data that could answer a particular priority area were then mapped and a grid for each format developed. Each of these grids added up to a total score of 100 for comparison purposes, but with the weight of different factors varying by priority and format based on the member survey results. As previously mentioned, the exception to this varied weighting were the criteria for “alignment with curriculum” and “cost,” which were weighted identically across each of the grids.

Grids

While developing the grids, the task force determined that, in addition to using these rubrics to evaluate current resources, it was also of interest to evaluate potential new resources in comparison to current holdings, using a similar approach.

Each grid, whether a new- or current-resource grid, contains overview data at the top, such as a product name, provider, cost, title count, subject area(s), brief description, and total resource score. Below this general information, the criteria is listed with subcriteria or metrics, with a possible score, score given, notes and calculations (e.g., a place to explain the reasoning behind a given score), rubric, and instructions for how to determine a score (Figure 1).

For the new-resource grid, not all criteria and metrics developed for the current-resource grid were applicable, so the concept was modified. A few metrics were necessarily eliminated and altered (e.g., usage by institution type and length of consortial subscription), with new metrics added in their place (e.g., number of current subscribers and alignment with state collection priorities), allowing the grids to still produce a sum of a 100, so that new- and current-resource grids could be compared against one another.

As noted previously, each grid was developed to include criteria that represented the top concerns of members, as well as to reflect overarching values. The top concerns of members were weighted more heavily than the values and were weighted in importance using the member survey results (Figure 2).

Resource Name:	Resource ABC				
Provider:	ABC Ltd.				
Acquisitions Model & Most Recent Cost:	Subscription; \$15,000				
Title Count:	1,000 full-text; 500 indexed				
Subject Area:	Multidisciplinary				
Description of Content:	Mixed print content				
Total Resource Score (out of 100):	87				
	For Evaluating Current Resources				
Criteria	Possible Score	Score Given	Notes & Calculations	Rubric	Instructions
1. Criterion 1					
a. Criterion 1a	10	5		<30% = 0 31-60% = 5 61-100% = 10	
b. Criterion 1b	10	7			
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	20	12			
2. Criterion 2					
a. Criterion 2a	6	6			
b. Criterion 2b	5	4			
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	11	10			
Total Scores	100	87			

Figure 1. Empty grid example.

	Criteria	Possible Score
Common across all formats	1. Alignment with Curriculum and/or Accreditation Requirements	
	a. Resource constitutes a high percentage of VIVA content within the subject area by format	6
	b. Resource belongs to subject area with high number of degrees awarded	6
	c. Percentage of total use coming from single highest-use institution	3
	d. Percentage of total use coming from highest-use institution type	3
	TOTAL CATEGORY Score	18
	2. Cost Effectiveness	
	b. Cost-per-Use	6
	a. Cost Avoidance	5
	c. Annual Increase	4
	d. Private Pooled Funds	3
	TOTAL CATEGORY Score	18
	3. Interoperability w/Discovery Systems	
	a. Discovery Tools in which Product is Indexed Examples include Primo, Summon, EBS, and WorldCat Discovery	9
	b. Quality of Metadata/Records	5
	TOTAL CATEGORY Score	14
	4. Easy, One-Stop Content Delivery	
	a. Platform	7
	b. Full-Text Availability	6
	TOTAL CATEGORY Score	13
5. Stable Access		
a. Length of VIVA Subscription	13	
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	13	

Figure 2. Database example of scored member resource criteria.

Most of the criteria could be scored using data that VIVA already collects and makes available to its members. There were, however, a few exceptions. One such exception was category 1a: "Resource constitutes a high percentage of VIVA content within the subject area by format." For this category, the VMTF had to develop a new data point that examines the importance of resources that make up a high degree of a specific subject within VIVA holdings. For example, if 50% of a given resource is nursing titles, but this is the only nursing resource VIVA subscribed to in this format area, it would constitute 100% of VIVA nursing resources. To get at this number, the task force created a spreadsheet with tabs for each format mapped to the top three subject areas held in that resource (Figure 3). This also works for the new-resource grid, as a resource may be added and the formula recalculated to show what percentage it *would* make up of VIVA resources in a given subject area.

The second example of needing to create a new data point can be seen in 1b: "Resource belongs to a subject area with high number of degrees awarded (Figure 2). This data already existed but was not easily mapped for libraries. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) lists the total degrees obtained for VIVA institutions. The task force took these and mapped them directly to LC classes, allowing for an individual filling out the grid to add up what percentage of state degrees are supported by that particular resource. This percentage then corresponds to a specific score on the grid.

Additional appendices of each grid include a metadata and a platform scorecard or checklist, curated to each format type, to ensure that individuals populating the grids use the same criteria. These scorecards are located on separate tabs and allow for indicating the presence or absence of certain MARC fields and platform features. When these scorecards are completed, they auto-populate into the grid.

Other more standard categories included in different grids, for which no new data had to be collected, include "cost effectiveness" (cost per use, cost avoidance, annual increases, and private pooled funds), "interoperability with discovery systems," "easy, one-stop content delivery," and "stable access."

VIVA values are also included on each resource grid, and although they vary between resource types, they include criteria categories such as "multidisciplinarity," "usage statistics" (e.g., COUNTER compliancy), "technical issues" (frequency and nature of issues, vendor responsiveness), and "support of open initiatives" (demonstrable commitment to open access publishing models) (Figure 4).

Four total format type grids were developed for both current- and new-resources. These include an e-book grid, streaming grid, journals grid, and database grid. All four grids may be found on the VIVA VMTF task force webpage: <http://www.vivalib.org/committees/collections/vmtf.html>. As testing and refining continue throughout the upcoming year, these grids will be updated.

A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	AW
name	# of resources	1st subject	2nd subject	3rd subject	Multi	% Multi	A	%A	B	%B	C	%C	Avg. Total w/Multi
Journal Package 1	300	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	19.20%
Journal Package 2	1000	B	R	Q	0	0%	0	0%	500	50%	0	0%	36.33%
Journal Package 3	37	Q	R	H	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	34.30%
Single Journal 1	1	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.06%
Single Journal 2	1	E	D	F	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	100.00%
Journal Package 4	112	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7.17%
Journal Package 5	111	Q	Q	T	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	70.45%
Single Journal 3	1	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.06%
Single Journal 4	1	R	R	R	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.15%
Journal Package 6	334	Multi	Multi	Multi	334	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	100.00%
Single Journal 5	1	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.06%
Single Journal 6	1	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.06%
Single Journal 7	1	Q	Q	Q	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0.06%
Journal Package 7	1677	Q	B	R	0	0%	0	0%	503	50%	0	0%	51.87%

Figure 3. Example of journals subject percentage makeup.

6. Multidisciplinarity	
a. Subject by Call Number	8
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	8
7. Usage Statistics	
a. COUNTER compliant	4
b. Institution-Level Statistics	3
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	7
8. Technical Issues	
a. Frequency and Nature of Technical Issues	3
b. Vendor Responsiveness	3
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	6
9. Supports Open Initiatives	
Demonstrable commitment to open initiatives/exploring alternate open access publishing models	3
TOTAL CATEGORY Score	3
Total Scores	100

Figure 4. Example of database values criteria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this process has enabled VIVA to understand how consortial holdings align with consortial values, standardize the ways in which new and existing products are reviewed, use data to strategically inform collection development, and compare dissimilar products. These grids are adaptable to member institutions' individual evaluation needs, as the group had hoped, and although complex at first glance, are designed to be "plug and play," not requiring the individual

completing the grid to do any of the background data gathering. As with all data analysis, the grids are meant to be the catalyst to broader conversations about consortial resources, giving reviewers a place to begin the tough conversations that must be had about the value of particular resources to their users. Finally, this framework has given the consortium a nuanced way to tell a fuller story of what it is precisely that VIVA provides to its members and to the state through thoughtful, data-informed, resource decisions.