
PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO PROGRAM AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Getting More from What You Already Do

Your library is already doing a lot. Every day, library staff help people find information, discover books, learn new skills, connect with others, solve problems, and access resources they might not otherwise have. With so much happening, it can be easy to move from one task to the next without pausing to consider what those activities make possible.

What if the next opportunity isn't to add something new, but to get more from something you're already doing? Getting more doesn't always mean doing more. It might mean clarifying a program's purpose, making a service easier to use, creating a stronger connection, or noticing an opportunity that has been there all along.

Look at Familiar Work with Fresh Eyes

Libraries often have more potential in their existing work than they realize. A program that has been offered for years, a service that patrons use regularly, or a daily interaction at the desk may all offer opportunities for refinement. The goal is to become curious about what could make an existing experience even more useful or meaningful. Consider these questions:

What are we already doing well?

Start with strengths. What do patrons appreciate? What consistently works? What do staff do particularly well?

What is this work making possible?

Look beyond the immediate task. What does a program, service, or interaction help someone do, understand, experience, or access?

Where is there room for a small shift?

What could be clearer, easier, more welcoming, more engaging, or more connected to what people need?

Four Ways to Get More from What You Already Do

These four areas offer a simple way to examine existing library work. You don't have to address all four. Start with the one that feels most relevant to something your library is already doing.

1. Clarify the Purpose

What is this really for? Sometimes a program or service continues because it has always been offered. Revisiting its purpose can help staff make intentional decisions about what to keep, change, or emphasize. Perhaps ask, "What do we hope people will experience, learn, or accomplish through this?" And then try adding a clear purpose statement to a program description, staff planning document, or service procedure.

2. Improve the Experience

What is it like for the person using the service? A service may be effective from the library's perspective but still have points of confusion, frustration, or unnecessary effort for patrons. Try asking, "Where might someone get stuck, feel uncertain, or need more support?" And then simplify one step, improve signage, adjust instructions, or make the first interaction more welcoming.

3. Create a Stronger Connection

How does this connect people to something that matters? Existing programs and services can become more meaningful when their connection to community interests, needs, or relationships is more visible. Start by asking, "What connection could we make more intentional?" For example, between people, resources, learning, creativity, or community life? Add a conversation, resource, follow-up opportunity, or partnership that extends the experience.

4. Notice What Could Grow

What possibilities are we overlooking? Reflection doesn't have to mean a formal evaluation. Sometimes the most useful insights come from noticing recurring questions, unexpected interests, or ideas that emerge naturally during the work. Ask, "What are people showing us through their questions, participation, or feedback? And then make a small shift by Capturing one observation after a program or interaction and use it to inform a future decision.

A Closer Look: One Program, Many Possibilities

Imagine your library offers a monthly community craft program. Attendance is steady, participants enjoy themselves, and staff consider it a success. There may be no reason to replace it. But looking at it through the four lenses above could reveal ways to build on what is already working.

Lens	Questions to Consider
Clarify the Purpose	Is the purpose simply to make a craft, or is it also about creativity, social connection, trying something new, or having a welcoming place to spend time?
Improve the Experience	Could instructions be offered in more than one format? Could participants choose between a guided project and an open-ended option?
Create a Stronger Connection	Could the program connect participants to related library resources, future programs, or opportunities to share what they created?
Notice What Could Grow	What do participants ask about or talk about while they're there? Could those observations inform a future program?

The point of this work is to recognize that the experience may already be doing more than one thing and to make thoughtful choices about whether any small adjustment would make it even more useful or enjoyable.

Start Small

One of the most effective ways to improve existing work is to resist the urge to change everything at once. Choose one program, service, or routine and ask:

- What is working well that we want to preserve?
- What is one thing we could make clearer, easier, or more purposeful?
- What small change could we try without creating a lot more work?
- What will we look for to see whether the change helped?