What Is Your Library Worth? Extension Uses Public Value Workshops in Communities

Abstract

Public libraries are seeing flat or reduced funding even as demands for new services are increasing. Facing an identical problem, Extension developed a program to identify the indirect benefits to non-participants of Extension programs in order to encourage their public funding support. This educational approach was customized to public libraries and piloted with 15 libraries. Evaluations demonstrated that the approach was popular and effective in changing local practices. Strategies are shared for customizing Extension's public value program so that any public program can articulate short private and public value statements.

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The digital revolution has challenged public libraries with growing demands for new services, such as digital books, Internet training and access, and remote access to library materials (Zurinski, Osborne, Anthoine-Ney, & McKenney, 2013). Yet many libraries are experiencing funding reductions or flat public funding, which creates anxiety about the future role of libraries (American Library Association, 2012d; Silka & Rumery, 2013).

In 2013, only 48% of Americans used a public library, and 28% of families contained no library patrons (Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, & Duggan, 2013). Given these figures, it is clear that maintaining public funding for libraries requires the support of non-patrons. This crucial non-patron support depends upon an understanding of the *indirect* benefits, or "public value," received from libraries. For their part, patrons must clearly understand the direct benefits, or "private value," that they receive from libraries.

Silka and Rumery (2013), after reviewing recent trends and changes in libraries, asked,

> In the face of increased emphasis on return on investment, what strategies can libraries use to measure returns on something as complex and multifaceted as the impact of libraries? As communities struggle to decide how to allocate their limited resources, can community-friendly decision tools be developed to help with the process? (p. 16)

Extension has had similar problems in explaining its value to the public. In 2003, Laura Kalambokidis of Minnesota Extension created an educational workshop to identify and describe the value of Extension programs to non-participants (Kalambokidis, 2004). Minnesota Extension community development educators used the Kalambokidis approach for other public services, including one library (personal communication from the perspective of an Extension educator leading a workshop for a Minnesota public library with George Morse, November 27, 2012.; personal communication on public value workshop for Minnesota library from the perspective of a library trustee with George Morse, November 28, 2012). Since Extension community development programs build local leadership

capacity, helping local leaders articulate the public value of their public services is a natural Extension community development programming effort.

The similarity in the missions of public libraries and Extension, as trusted information intermediaries, and the mutual benefits of close collaboration to both institutions, has been described (Concannon, Rafferty, & Swanson-Farmarco, 2011; Holmes, 1987; O'Neill, 2013; Pinkerton & Glazier, 1993). However, none of these articles explicitly address ways to measure the public value of libraries or other public services.

This article (1) outlines differences between private and public value, as well as why there is a need for tools that are "community-friendly"; (2) describes how we customized the Kalambokidis workshops for public libraries; (3) describes short- and long-term evaluation results; and (4) suggests recommendations for Extension educators working with libraries or with other public services.

Private Versus Public Value of Libraries

Private Value

The private value of any public service is defined as the value accruing directly to the participants of the service (Kalambokidis, 2004). For example, participants in an Extension family-finance education program "spend and borrow responsibly, save more, and gain control over their financial health" (University of Missouri Extension, no date). Each program has different benefits to participants; therefore, the private value differs. Likewise, the private value for different library services is best articulated for the specific service or program. Preschoolers who learn to love reading through library programs and books illustrate one example of a library's private value.

The private value of libraries has been documented empirically by (1) surveys of library patrons, asking about the importance of different aspects of their library (Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, & Duggan, 2013), and (2) estimates of the savings experienced by patrons as a result of borrowing books and digital media and participating in free programs (Elliott, Holt, Hayden, & Holt, 2006; pp. 18–20). For example, Griffiths, King, Tomer, Lynch, and Harrington (2004) found benefits to be $5.20 per dollar expended by Florida's libraries.

Public Value

Public value is defined as the value of a public service to individuals *who do not use the service,* but who benefit indirectly as others use the service (Kalambokidis, 2004). Extension describes the public value of improved financial literacy as "reducing predatory lending, reliance on public assistance programs and crime" (University of Missouri, no date). Preschoolers who become habitual readers as a result of library early-reader programs tend to be more successful in school (private value). They will generally require fewer remedial education resources (a public value to all taxpayers).

Two estimation approaches have been used to document the public value of libraries. These include (1) willingness-to-pay estimates using Contingent Valuation Analysis (CVA) and (2) capitalization of libraries' public value into property value. When CVA surveys include library non-patrons, they can capture the public value. Previous CVA studies for libraries have found values ranging from 1.3 to 10 times the operating costs (Missingham, 2005; Aabo, 2005). The capitalization approach assumes that amenities, including libraries, will be capitalized into home values. High-quality research on the capitalization of a library's public value is very technical (Hausman, 2012; Carson, 2012) and, hence, very rare (Thornburgh, 2010). A third method of empirically measuring public value by examining changes in the behavior of patrons is in its infancy (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013). While this research is promising, it will be many years before these results are useable.

Three aspects of these empirical approaches have discouraged their use by library advocates. First, none are community-friendly tools with which community members can make decisions. Most local leaders understand

neither the conceptual framework nor the research methods that must be used. Second, most of this research is designed for large urban areas, making it difficult to use the benefit-transfer method for smaller communities (Rosenberger, Randall, & Loomis, 2003). Third, none of these approaches engages a team of community leaders in the kind of exchange of ideas that is necessary to build an effective local campaign for their library.

Identifying the Private and Public Value of Our Library Workshops

In 2013, we developed a community-friendly framework that local leaders could use to identify the nature of their library's private and public value. The resulting workshop is based on the following approaches:

- A long history of public sector economics (Pigou, 1924);

- The educational approaches used to identify the public value of Extension programs (Kalambokidis, 2004) and Minnesota public services, including one library (personal communication, November 27, 2012; personal communication, November 28, 2012); and

- Facilitated community development methodologies to enhance citizen engagement (Haskell, Cyr, & McPhail, 2007)/

The following sections summarize the goals, participants, and agenda of the workshop.

Goals

After the three-hour workshop, participants were able to:

- Explain the benefits of the library to patrons in monetary terms (i.e. "private value");

- Explain the indirect benefits of the library to non-patrons as well as to patrons (i.e. "public value");

- Draft, articulate, and critique 30-second statements explaining the public value of supporting public libraries; and

- Identify the next steps in follow-up plans for sharing these messages.

Participants

Between March 2013 and January 2014, we held four workshops for 15 libraries. The four workshops averaged 24 participants each and included library staff, foundation members, trustees, friends of the library, or others (Table 1).

Table 1.
Workshop Participation: Identifying the Private and Public Value of Our Library

Workshop Location / Maine Communities Participating	Number of Communities	Number of Participants
Southern Maine/ Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough, South Portland,* and Westbrook	4	24
Mid-coastal Maine/ Camden, Rockland, and Rockport*	3	23
Western Maine/ Farmington, Rangeley,* Rumford, and Wilton	4	25

Central Maine/ Bangor,* Hampden, Old Town, and Orono	4	23
Total Communities and Participants	15	95
* workshop host communities		

Building Partnerships with State and Local Leaders

In the Extension public value workshops, Extension administrators actively encouraged team participation (Kalambokidis Blog, 2008–2014; Markell, 2009; Franz 2011). Hence, after the first pilot workshop, we met with the Maine state librarian and Maine Regional Library Service (MRLS) district consultants to explain the program and invite them to a workshop. After two MRLS district consultants attended the second workshop, they encouraged two additional communities to sponsor workshops.

Workshop Description

A sample agenda for the 3-hour workshop is outlined in Table 2. We blended short presentations (about 1 hour total) with facilitated, same-library cohort group discussions.

Table 2.

Sample Workshop Agenda: Identifying the Private & Public Value of
Our Library

Time	Topic
9:30 AM	Welcome & First Small-Group Discussion
10:00 AM	Private Value Concept & Calculator
10:15 AM	Public Value Concept & Examples
10:30 AM	Library Support Motivations Explored: Martin Case Study
11:00 AM	Public Value Logic Models
11:10 AM	Public Value Statement Development
11:45 AM	Evaluation
12:00 PM	Local Next Steps
12:30 PM	Adjourn

To set the tone, we asked small groups to discuss trends affecting public libraries (e.g., changes in services requested, changes in public funding) immediately following introductions. We then shared several national library

trends, both to supplement the local discussion and to build our own credibility with the audience.

Next we introduced the concept of private value, as well as a means of estimating it by using the American Library Association's (2013) online library value calculator. The full group discussed the strength and weakness of this approach for measuring the library's value. Groups usually identified the principle weakness of these calculators: that they ignore the public value of the programs. If they did, we reinforced it. If they missed this, we pointed this out.

The public value concept and several examples were presented next. To reinforce the public value concept of enlightened self-interest, we used a case study about Martin M. Martin, who generously donates to, but does not use, the library. Small groups were asked to identify the motives they thought drove Martin's support. Typically, these fell into four motivations: altruism, community pride, an implied social contract with earlier generations to pay forward, and enlightened self-interest. We then stated that the public value discussion focuses on the enlightened self-interest motivation.

We coached the small groups to identify a specific service in their library and used a logic model to trace the impacts of the private value and then the public value (Kalambokidis Blog, November 19, 2013). Then, we instructed the small groups to develop a 30-second statement for the logic model they had developed. Each small group shared these statements twice with the full group. First, they were simply read (and timed). In the next reading, the group offered constructive suggestions on ways to strengthen or improve them.

An evaluation was administered before the final topic, in order to achieve a high response rate. To conclude, the full group discussed ways their libraries hope to share the messages.

Evaluation of Workshops

End-of-Workshop Evaluations

An 88% response rate was achieved, with 84 responses from 95 participants.

- 91% reported that they would recommend this workshop to peers in other communities.

- 75% recommended that their local group meet to develop a plan for sharing public value messages.

- 74% encouraged use of the value calculator to estimate their library's private value, in addition to the 21% already using it.

- 54% planned to make one or more new changes in the way they shared their libraries' public value messages, averaging 2.3 new ways.

- 41% planned to share their public value messages in new ways (Table 3), for a 64% increase.

Table 3.
Percentage of Participants Planning New Ways to Share Public Value Messages

Ways of Sharing Public Value Statements	Used Before Workshop (%)	Will Use in the Future (%)	Change (%)
On our library's website	24	57	33
Letter to the local paper	21	48	27
In our library's monthly e-letter	16	42	26

In our annual appeal for funds	42	48	6
Other	14	21	7
On our library's Facebook page	10	17	7
N=42, except for Facebook and e-newsletter where N=19			

We asked an open-ended question about what participants liked about the workshop.

- 48% liked the interaction with presenters and the facilitated small-group discussions, which allowed all participants to contribute and "drew out group information."

- 32% liked the opportunity to create public value statements for their own library.

- 30% wrote that it was well organized and used time efficiently.

- 12% liked the chance to exchange ideas with other libraries (at one workshop, the staff from the different libraries had never met in person).

Participants appreciated the workshop, will recommend it, and indicated that they will take steps to use the information to advocate the value of their local libraries. To test the inherent public value of these workshops, we administered an online evaluation several months later to determine whether participants used the knowledge to increase the community's awareness of the public value of their libraries.

Follow-Up Online Survey

In early March 2014, we emailed invitations to all workshop participants to learn what had happened in the interim. We received 39 responses, which was a 41% response rate based on all 95 participants. In sum, here is what they reported:

- 86% of respondents had used at least one new means of communicating the public value of their library, with 52% using three or more methods (Table 4).

- 85% are currently comfortable or very comfortable using public value messages.

- 78% have encouraged more use of the library value calculator for private value.

Table 4.
Methods Individuals Used to Spread Library Awareness Through Public Value Messages*

Methods of Sharing Public Value Messages	Have Not Explained	Haven't Used but Will Soon	Have Used 1 to 3 Times	Have Used 4 or More Times
Discussed with a neighbor or friend	16%	11%	61%	13%
Spoke to the library trustees, friends, or foundation	24%	5%	58%	13%
Spoke to a city official	43%	5%	45%	8%
Spoke to other	50%	16%	32%	3%

organization				
Wrote letter to the local paper	82%	8%	8%	3%

Qualitative Evaluation Evidence

In the follow-up survey, we also asked the question, "What is one thing you have done differently after attending the workshop?" We heard from libraries representing all four workshops (Table 5). This open-ended question provided more subtle insights on the outcomes. Several respondents mentioned that they are focusing their discussion of benefits more carefully and considering indirect benefits (public value) as well as private value. A number indicated that they spoke with more confidence than they had earlier and hence were speaking to more people.

Table 5.
Things Participants Are Doing Differently Since Workshops *

Respondent's Background	One Thing Being Done Differently After Workshop
Librarian	"We are thinking differently about who our pitch is targeted to. I've created posters, shared studies and web links . . . targeting taxpayers and town councilors."
Librarian	"Used fewer statistics and more stories about how the Library is an important part of the community even for people that don't use it on a regular basis."
Library trustee	"Spoke with more confidence and specificity in public meetings regarding the reach and value of the library to our community."
Librarian	"I am more focused (and) better able to gear my conversations to benefits that directly affect the individual I am conversing with."
Elected official	"I tend to explain to more people the value of the library to our entire community. Since I am on the City Council and this is budget season it is certainly the appropriate time of year."
Friend of library	"We are preparing some advertisements to place in prominent places in the library and around town."
Librarian	"Focused on the greater context, especially when it comes to tax— children supported better in literacy development at a young age = less burden on schools = less remedial intervention = lower tax burden."

Feedback from Library Leaders

Several library leaders suggested that Extension explore ways to work with libraries statewide. Linda Lord, the Maine State Librarian, was one of these, saying, "It is critical that every resident and organization understand the

value that a public library brings to a community. Libraries must initiate finding ways to collaborate and demonstrate the library's value—especially to non-library users" (Personal communication with Jane Haskell, April 10, 2014). We are currently exploring options for an expanded effort.

Sample Private and Public Value Statements

There is no perfect or "correct" library public value statement. The statements developed during workshops (Table 6) generally meet the following criteria:

1. Addresses a specific type of patron for a specific library service.

2. Limited to one change in behavior by the patrons.

3. Limited to one or two types of indirect benefit to non-patrons.

4. Can be expressed comfortably in less than 30 seconds (typically 70 words).

5. Includes an "ask" for financial and/or political support for the library.

6. Is factually correct. (Generally, statements are hypotheses that reference librarians can help verify.)

Missouri Extension demonstrates multiple ways to state public value in several areas of work (University of Missouri Extension, no date). Similarly, library workshop participants expressed public value for the same service or program differently.

Table 6.
Sample Private and Public Value Statements for Public Libraries

Private-Value Statements
"Can you believe this?! It would have cost $352,699 to purchase the adult books circulated at the Edythe Dyer Community Library last year! Check out www.maine.gov/msl/services/calculator.htm"
"Our local library saves our family a lot of money. Last year we borrowed just over $1,500 worth of old fashion books, digital books for our e-readers, videos, and an online program to learn French. The language program alone would have cost us $500. We used the Maine State Library's "use value calculator" to estimate this. If anything, it is a conservative estimate."
Public Value Statements
Libraries Encourage An Early Love of Reading, Leading to Greater Efficiency in Schools   "Children in our library's preschool programs have greater success in school, reducing remedial costs (and lowering taxes). Youth continue to read during school breaks, doing better academically, earning more, and handing on their love of reading."
"Our library is a great investment because it is a vital part of our community's infrastructure. If we support our library, children using the story times and summer reading program may become more sophisticated readers and learners, which not only benefits them but all of us by increasing our high school's graduation rate."
"Did you know that our library is a "Family Place Library," an initiative that helps

libraries develop their full potential as community hubs for healthy child and family development, parent and community involvement, and lifelong learning beginning at birth? In addition to benefiting families with young children, this indirectly benefits all other local residents by making the community a more attractive place to live, which translates into better property values."

Libraries Deliver Adult Educational Services, Benefiting Participants and Community

"Our library sponsors Lawyers in Libraries, a project where volunteer attorneys provide free seminars and individual consultation with low-income citizens by live video conferencing. It helps families in economic stress address legal questions, and indirectly benefits others in our community, as the odds of bankruptcy are reduced."

"Did you know that our library helped 80 people apply for new jobs in the past month? We helped some develop new resumes and others used the library's computers to complete online job applications. Not only does this directly help them, but indirectly it benefits all of us as they can contribute more to the local tax base and need fewer social services."

"One of the examples of how our library is a good investment is its role as an incubator for new micro-businesses. A one-person consulting firm uses our library's small meeting rooms to hold occasional meetings with clients, in addition to using the reference materials for business planning. Indirectly, this benefits the rest of the community by creating a more robust local business climate."

"One of the most valuable but generally unnoticed services of our local library is the digital education programs for seniors. By helping seniors learn to use the Internet, the library fosters cultural awareness, self-sufficiency, and community investment in our older population. Indirectly this benefits all of us by helping to keep them in the community and contributing to its culture."

Libraries Build A Sense of Community, Encouraging Civic Engagement

"Our library is vital to our community as a public living room, where everyone—from natives to retirees 'from away'—is welcome, regardless of age, politics, or religion. While this directly benefits patrons, it also indirectly benefits the whole town because it makes the community a more attractive place, increasing home values."

"Our library hosts "Meet the Candidates" nights. Attendees benefit from a better understanding of the views of candidates. Other local citizens benefit because candidates are obliged to publically reveal their positions on key issues."

"Public libraries are used most heavily by parents with very young children, and older or retired individuals who no longer are mid-career and delivering children to activities. Yet, many citizens who use the library less still support strong libraries, because they know that they, or their very young grandchildren, are likely to need it someday."

Note: This is type of public value is called "option value."

Source: These public value statements were developed at the workshops by small teams and edited slightly by the authors.

Strategies for Developing Public Value Workshops for Any Public

Service

We learned from four workshops with 15 public libraries that Extension community development educators can help public libraries or other public services understand and develop public value statements using these strategies. It is important to focus on one public service (e.g., libraries, schools, or parks) rather than multiple services. This is essential to build credibility with the target audience and to implement the following essential steps.

- Adapt the well-tested Extension public value workshop curriculum (Kalambokidis, 2004) to fit the context of the target public service being addressed (in our case, libraries).

  - Study trends affecting public support for the target service; integrate trends into presentation to build credibility with audience.

  - Include a discussion of private value to help participants understand the difference between private and public values.

  - Focus only on the indirect benefits to non-patrons rather than discussing all reasons for public support, to allow time for in-depth group discussion.

- Meet with state leaders in the target service early on: invite them to attend, provide feedback on improvements, and encourage others to participate.

- Require four- to six-person teams from each local entity or program.

- Include workshop time for teams to develop strategies for communicating public value statements to change hearts and minds.

- Deliver three or four "pilot" workshops to introduce the concept and build credibility.

- Use a two-person Extension team initially, with one person having a solid understanding of the economics of public value, and the second having strong facilitation skills and strong connections to the target audience.

- Cross-train during the pilot phase, and shift to a one-person delivery system to reduce program costs.

Conclusions

Public libraries are undergoing transitions as they adjust to the digital age, as well as to increased public-funding pressures. Many libraries are eager to identify their value to both patrons (i.e., private value) and to the taxpayers who do not use the library (i.e., public value). Library leaders have called for the development of what has been described as "community-friendly decision tools" to identify and communicate these values of libraries.

The Kalambokidis approach to identifying the public value of Extension's programs has applicability to any publicly funded service. Using a customized approach with other public services is a natural extension of community development programming. This builds community capacity by helping community leaders develop community-friendly decision tools that articulate the value of a public amenity, such as a library.

We customized the Extension public value workshop in 2013 to fit a new audience, and facilitated four interactive workshops with 15 public library teams in four regions of Maine. Evaluation of our customized approach was encouraging: over 80% of respondents in a follow-up survey reported having used new public value messages. State library leaders have encouraged us to explore ways to deliver this program more widely.

Extension community development educators can help staff in public libraries and/or other public services (such as schools, parks, etc.) to understand their unique private and public value. To do so, however, each new service will need a customized educational program that can be replicated often enough to build credibility with its local and state leaders.

Acknowledgements

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