

TOWARDS A MODERN, INCLUSIVE LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD

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PURPOSE AND GOALS

- Determine the prevalence, composition, and value of advisory groups for academic libraries in 2022
- Provide guidance for assessment librarians and other who currently facilitate advisory groups or are interested in doing so.
- Make recommendations for modernization of and inclusivity within these groups.
- Explore ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic and a broader increase in the availability of virtual/hybrid options for participation have impacted current practice around advisory group recruitment, participation, meeting formats, and overall group utility moving forward.

STUDY COMPONENTS

- Census of ARL academic library websites to determine the prevalence and characteristics of library Advisory Groups in 2022.
- Semi-structured interviews with librarians who are responsible for facilitation of these groups to identify ways in which these groups have evolved and determine best practices for utilizing these groups in the current moment.

FINDINGS - CENSUS

- Reviewed websites of 126 ARL member libraries for mentions of advisory groups
- 84 of 126 (67%) had evidence of at least one group, 27 mentioned multiple groups (21% overall, 32% of those with any groups)
- Not a perfect count – some groups may exist that aren't mentioned, some groups may no longer be active

TYPES OF ADVISORY GROUPS

- Chartered
- Discretionary:
 - General Advisory
 - Population-Based
 - Initiative-Based
- Fundraising

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

- Conducted ten interviews from a variety of universities (not limited to ARL members)
- 9 states represented, mix of public and private
- Variety of roles within libraries
- Ranged from ~1500 students to ~36,000
- Mixture of board types, some with multiple active boards

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Background on library, institution, and advisory group(s) or other feedback mechanisms
- Typical structure of group, recruitment practices, meeting schedules/formats
- Strategies for increasing engagement among group members generally
- Strategies for recruitment of diverse members and engagement around DEI issues
- Pandemic changes to group operations

RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

- Discretionary groups most flexibility in recruitment/membership
- Student groups generally have an “application process” even if nearly everyone is accepted
 - Word of mouth from past members is helpful, targeted outreach to key offices/groups on campus, general social media/email blasts
 - Smaller institutions may need to rely on student workers
- Chartered groups typically have less influence over membership but can encourage key faculty to seek out membership
- Fundraising group recruitment involves significant relationship-building

MEETING SCHEDULES AND FORMATS

- Most groups met at least twice per semester, with some as frequently as once per month
 - Historically, these were near universally in-person meetings with food if students were involved
 - One institution had been experimenting with hybrid meetings before the pandemic
- Chartered groups may have requirements for meeting frequency/format
- Fundraising groups again were the exception, and tended to meet only once or twice per year for longer meetings/functions

ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT AND OPEN CONVERSATION

- Get to know members individually via one-on-one or small group meetings if possible
- Provide a variety of ways to give feedback (nonverbal, asynchronous, anonymous)
- Allow the group to set norms around confidentiality, respect for differing experiences
- Respond to concerns and closing the loop on issues – demonstrate responsiveness early in the process
- For busy students, give participants a sense of ownership over the group through leadership opportunities, priority-setting
 - Some groups ask students to plan an event or provide a budget for a board project

RECRUITING FOR DIVERSITY & REPRESENTATIVENESS

- Disciplinary representativeness (important and often required for Chartered groups)
- Most participants felt that their group was generally representative of the racial/cultural makeup of their institution
 - Targeted outreach to key units/populations is helpful, particularly effective when there are specific projects impacting these group
- Can be difficult to increase diversity in fundraising groups, but focusing on younger alumni is helpful

ENGAGEMENT AND OPENNESS ON DEI ISSUES

- Most interviewees self-identified as white, and there was not a lot of diversity in permanent group facilitators at their institutions
- Bringing in a variety of library staff as topically appropriate for meetings can help demonstrate more diversity on the library end
- In general, same best practices apply here as well:
 - Provide a variety of ways to give feedback and acknowledge when topics are sensitive
 - Respond to concerns and close the loop, show appreciation when difficult experiences are shared

PANDEMIC OPERATIONAL CHANGES

- Most sticking with hybrid meeting format indefinitely, some staying completely remote
- General sense that virtual/hybrid meetings allowed for involvement of a broader range of participants – even if more challenging to facilitate effectively
- Students (and donors too!) not quite as food-motivated as you might expect

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Additional data analysis on census info
- Outreach to libraries with specifically DEI-focused advisory groups
- Community of practice for facilitators of advisory groups
 - Email me: anita.hall@louisville.edu if you would like to be included!