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Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries

Julene L. Jones

University of Kentucky, julene.jones@uky.edu

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Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries

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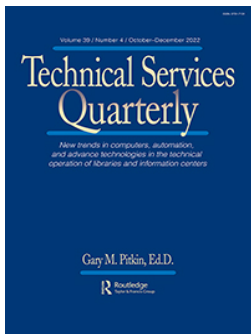
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Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries [Book review].pdf

Julene L. Jones, *University of Kentucky*



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Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries

Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries, by Rachel A. Fleming-Mayand Regina Mays, Chicago, IL, ALA Neal-Schuman, 2021, 254 pp., \$65.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-8389-4998-6, Series: ALA Fundamentals Series

Julene L. Jones

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The job description of a scholarly communications librarian has a broad list of expected duties, and in addition to the projects mentioned above, they frequently spread knowledge of tools and resources to support faculty and student research. The book's closing section, "Tools, Trends, and Best Practices for Modern Researchers," covers this aspect of scholarly communications librarianship. Several case studies discuss the acceptability of delegating responsibilities to others; for example, you may choose to organize and market a workshop, but delegate the responsibility of teaching to another librarian or an expert in the field. A few case studies highlight that the scholarly communication librarian can coordinate a workshop with other facilitators to demonstrate the software or tools used with several topics, such as citation managers and LaTeX coding; however, I do not believe it is necessary for those involved with scholarly communications to be experts in every topic related to research.

Many case studies mention that their work includes teaching workshops on research tools and the research process. Though the case studies speak of the excellent seminars led or held in the library, they frequently mention the issue of deciding between using software on lab computers or having students bring their own laptops. Unfortunately, other challenges were left out of the case studies. In my experience, assisting with scholarly communications programs, the biggest challenge is marketing and getting students and faculty interested in scholarly communications topics. The fantastic work done daily by those in scholarly communications is often thankless. While the feasibility of implementing these projects at your library will vary, the case studies may provide inspiration for a proposal that is perfect for your library.

While I am unfamiliar with the other books in this series, I like that *The Scholarly Communications Cookbook* provides short summaries and ingredients of projects others have tested. I believe that one of the most valuable sections is the additional resources. This section provides links to additional information and example handouts. While the variety of case studies sets this book apart from others, the abbreviated nature of these case studies limits the book's usefulness as an actual recipe you could follow step-by-step without the additional resources.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Susan Elkins

Head of Digital Initiatives, Newton Gresham Library, Sam Houston State University

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Fundamentals of Planning and Assessment for Libraries, by Rachel A. Fleming-May and Regina Mays, Chicago, IL, ALA Neal-Schuman, 2021, 254 pp., \$65.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-8389-4998-6, Series: ALA Fundamentals Series

This extensive yet approachable monograph presents the basics of planning and assessment in a manner suited for both information science students and early practitioners in library assessment. The authors have each worked in assessment in academic or public libraries, and one is now a professor in the University of Tennessee's School of Information Science where

she teaches a planning and assessment course. Their vast expertise is accessibly recorded in this *ALA Fundamentals Series* monograph which continues the series' work to provide overviews of broad areas of library science.

Informed by their recent survey of academic library assessment practitioners, Fleming-May and Mays acknowledge that most library assessment employees arrive at this work indirectly with little formal assessment instruction. Using a constructivist approach and guided by data from their survey about practitioners' position requirements they introduce planning and assessment work comprehensively, including references to critical assessment throughout, as well as their critique of assessment methods, instruments and representation of data. Their guiding principles of assessment are outlined in the initial chapter and are fleshed out in chapters regarding the planning processes, history of assessment practices, basic principles of assessment, data collection (both direct and indirect), and data analysis and reporting. The book concludes with an abbreviated yet highly effective manual of how to create a culture of assessment. This last chapter is notable in its emphasis on the need for new assessment librarians to work across the organization in collaborative yet genuine ways and the significance of communicating assessment data and results to encourage those providing the data to see the value in their doing so. Adding that an attitude of "there is no failure, only feedback" is most useful, the authors cheerfully coach their readers to approach assessment as an iterative process that provides information, no matter the flaws in planning or methodology that may be subsequently discovered.

Written in the conversational tone of a trusted assessment mentor, this work clearly describes the reality of working as a library assessment professional: despite our best efforts, the data we collect is rarely definitive, completely accurate, statistically significant, or without the possible influence of confounding factors. Best practices and dependable advice to address these issues are offered thoughtfully by the authors: how to write an effective survey and analyze its results, how to approach gatekeeping colleagues for their data or access to it, how to perform an assessment data inventory, how to determine which types of data are most important for external agency rankings, and how to encourage a collaborative culture of assessment in your organization.

The five appendices include a high-quality sample library assessment plan, an informed consent form, a sample space observation study form, a list of recommended library assessment journals and conferences, as well as a sample assessment librarian position description.

The only critiques I can make of this engaging volume are extremely minor. First, there are a few cases in which the authors are critical of one aspect of an assessment instrument or method but fail to present criticisms of others. My other minor, less-than-positive observation is that this work does not mention accreditation, though that is certainly understandable, given the various accreditation agencies' requirements.

This realistic and pragmatic monograph may be read in its entirety for an overview or consulted a section or chapter at a time as needed, for instance, during strategic planning or when performing data analysis. The book's utility is increased by the fact that it includes explanatory charts, resources for further reading at the end of each chapter, a brief glossary, and an extensive index. Those interested in both public and academic library assessment will find this a useful volume.

Julene L. Jones
University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA
✉ julene.jones@uky.edu

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The Disaster Planning Handbook for Libraries, by Mary Grace Flaherty, Chicago, IL, ALA Editions, 2022, 151 pp., \$54.99, ISBN: 978-0-8389-3799-0

No library is immune to disaster, whether natural or manmade. While all librarians hope that it will never happen in their library, there are no guarantees, and every library can benefit from having a disaster plan to lay out procedures for when the worst does occur. In addition, libraries are often resources that people turn to in times of disaster, and such a plan can also address how a library can help its community. *The Disaster Planning Handbook for Libraries* by Mary Grace Flaherty aims to give libraries a better understanding of what a disaster plan is, why to have one, and what should be included.

The first two chapters cover the history of disaster planning and recovery in America, and define what a disaster plan is, what organizations/agencies/people should be involved in creating the plan, and what steps should be taken before even embarking on plan creation (such as a risk assessment). The second chapter is particularly helpful in thinking about what local, state or other agencies may be relevant to a particular library, and where help might come from should a disaster arise.

Chapter 3, “The Human Element,” discusses how people react to disasters and how the library can help both its staff and its community cope with them. It then briefly covers some human-caused disasters such as active shooters and bomb threats, as well as the disaster that has recently affected every library in existence, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4 is possibly the most useful chapter of the book. It covers natural disasters such as floods, fires, and tornadoes. For each natural disaster, there are recommendations for what should be in the disaster plan, lists of potential resources for further assistance, and stories told by librarians who faced each type of disaster. These are helpful in showing how a library can overcome such things, giving hope and stories of firsthand experience. The resources given for disaster planning for each type of occurrence are excellent and plentiful.

Chapter 5 discusses aspects of the physical library building as they relate to disaster planning, such as having a fire plan, bomb threat procedures, escape routes for evacuation, and salvage priorities and procedures. It also talks about how to have your building best prepped for potential disasters in the first place, such as regular inspections and the like. Chapter 6 covers considerations specific to archives and special collections, both physical and digital, and the last chapter ties everything together with final thoughts. As an appendix, there is a sample memorandum of understanding for libraries collaborating on disaster response from the National Library of Medicine.

On the whole, the book is well-written by knowledgeable librarians. It is applicable to all types and sizes of libraries. The references are plentiful and there are many, many links to useful resources online. It has an extensive index for anyone wanting to see what the book has to say on any specific topic. This is an excellent resource, particularly for natural disasters and related problems (floods can come from storms but also from broken pipes). It could have benefited from more discussion of non-natural disasters – in our current