



Proficiencies for Assessment in Academic Libraries

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Preamble

The *Proficiencies for Assessment in Academic Libraries* is an update to *ACRL Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators* that were approved by the ACRL Board in January 2017. In the six short years since they were initially approved, the need for proficiencies related to social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility became apparent. In response, two ACRL goal-level committees, the Value of Academic Libraries Committee and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, formed a working group to address these gaps and ensure equity is prioritized in library assessment. The working group was expanded to include

professionals from both academic libraries and higher education assessment communities who have expertise in equity-centered assessment.

Impetus for Change

The updated *Proficiencies* were developed with an understanding that individuals conducting library assessment play an important role in guiding their organizations in evidence-informed decision-making and promoting a culture of assessment. Assessments are conducted for myriad reasons, including, but not limited to:

1. assessing needs in order to identify opportunities for positive change;
2. informing decision-making;
3. identifying opportunities to better align library resources and services with university goals;
4. exposing and addressing inequitable structures and systems of power and privilege; and
5. demonstrating value and impact.

In doing assessment work, there is an underlying expectation that assessment practitioners promote the perspectives of all members of their campus communities, particularly those who are marginalized. Working group members acknowledge that no standards, including these *Proficiencies*, are neutral; they reflect the lived experiences of the working group members responsible for creating them, and regular updating will be necessary to incorporate ongoing development and learning in areas of expertise.

Definition and Scope

The *Proficiencies* provide a common definition of assessment responsibilities and describe the ethics, knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and mindsets to empower both those with and without formal leadership positions to engage in library assessment. The *Proficiencies* focus on broad areas rather than a comprehensive list of skills; they outline an approach to assist individuals and organizations in selecting the proficiencies most appropriate for their environment and situational context, rather than identifying job tasks for specific job positions. The definition of assessment practitioner in these proficiencies includes any library employee or stakeholder with assessment duties. In some cases, a library position may encompass the entire span of assessment proficiencies and may involve coordination and supervision of others. In other cases, individual library employees may need only a portion of the proficiencies to complete an assessment project.

Recommended Uses

The *Proficiencies* provide ethical guidance and enable assessment practitioners to recognize strengths and identify areas for professional growth. Use of the *Proficiencies* will vary depending upon the institution, context, and needs of an organization. The *Proficiencies* can be used to

write job descriptions, identify candidates for a position, plan for onboarding, establish baseline measures and gauge progress towards goals, provide clear expectations, assess performance, identify skill gaps, and design professional development programs. For library and information studies educators, the *Proficiencies* may help guide student learning outcomes and course design. The *Proficiencies* are a step forward in establishing library assessment as a field that is grounded in an understanding of purposes, values, and theories around assessment.

Central Tenets

To make the best use of the *Proficiencies for Assessment in Academic Libraries*, individuals engaging in assessment should:

- Apply ethics to guide all assessment practices.
- Center assessment around people and their well-being.
- Approach assessment with a continuous learning and growth mindset.
- Identify and communicate an assessment or research project's purpose, goal, or outcome.
- Develop and maintain an equitable, accessible, and inclusive lens by practicing cultural humility, and equity-minded and antiracist assessment.
- Recognize that assessment and data analysis are non-neutral and subjective processes that require individuals involved in this work to acknowledge their own positionalities, recognize their biases, modify their approaches, and collaborate with others when possible to include multiple and alternative perspectives.
- Approach data with nuance, take multiple approaches as necessary to identify equity challenges, make space to include marginalized perspectives, identify and document any gaps in collected data, and consider variability among groups along with measures of central tendency.

Proficiencies

1. Engaging Ethically

Ethics convey overarching principles that guide decision-making in professional practice. Ethical practitioners protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of assessment and research participants and the communities to which they belong, protect them from harm, and engage in culturally responsive and relationally reflexive research practices.

Library assessment practitioners should:

- 1.1. Affirm every person's inherent dignity and rights by demonstrating beneficence, justice, and respect for persons. Maintain and enhance knowledge and skills with ongoing training in ethical and institutional review processes.
- 1.2. Protect the safety of participants by prioritizing their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Act with integrity in the collection, analysis, dissemination, and implementation of assessment findings.
- 1.3. Advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, and profession through advocacy, collaboration, allocation of resources, and taking action on findings.
- 1.4. Critically interrogate current and past assessment and data collection practices to ensure ethical practices are being followed and equitable outcomes are being produced.

2. Building Knowledge of Assessment in Libraries and Higher Education

Library assessment is grounded in an understanding of the purposes, values, and theories underpinning assessment methodologies and practices. Those undertaking library assessment should understand the history and context of their work in educational assessment, evaluation, and measurement in order to participate meaningfully in wider institutional efforts. Many of the methods we rely upon were developed by Western researchers with privilege. Centering social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility and critically examining all assessment activities will challenge practitioners to dismantle inequitable systems and structures.

Library assessment practitioners should:

- 2.1. Demonstrate familiarity with assessment methods and practices, as well as knowledge of the differences between assessment, evaluation, and research practices.
- 2.2. Continually enhance knowledge and skills, and maintain an understanding of literature, standards, and trends in the field of higher education and library assessment.
- 2.3. Integrate knowledge of social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in libraries and higher education into assessment practices.

3. Designing, Collecting, & Analyzing

Working with data and evidence is foundational to assessment work. Valid, reliable, and trustworthy findings are optimal for sound decision-making. Proficiency in designing assessment projects and collecting and analyzing data enables practitioners to consider their methods critically in order to enhance students' educational experiences, ensure the effectiveness of library services, illuminate and dismantle inequitable systems and structures, and advance equity and inclusion for their campus communities.

Library assessment practitioners should:

Design

- 3.1. Develop, implement, and sustain practices that ensure diverse community perspectives are represented throughout every phase of the assessment cycle.
- 3.2. Challenge racialized systems and avoid coded language that portrays marginalized populations from a deficit perspective.
- 3.3. Conceptualize, document, and implement a plan for obtaining, storing, and analyzing data that aligns with the rationale and goals of the project so that assessment work is centered on impact.
- 3.4. Engage diverse stakeholders such as students, faculty, and staff in all phases of assessment, including the design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, and creation of recommendations, when possible.
- 3.5. Evaluate critically what data are needed to make informed decisions, collecting and using only what is necessary to address the goals of the study. Utilize existing data sources when possible in order to minimize duplication of efforts and participant burden.
- 3.6. Utilize assessment approaches and methods that will engage communities in a manner that is responsive, culturally relevant, and reflects their context and values.
- 3.7. Consider multiple methodologies and data sources (i.e., triangulation) in order to foster a deep understanding of results.
- 3.8. Identify or design assessment instruments that are appropriate for the assessment project and will yield useful data. Ensure the instruments are equitable and accessible for all participants.
- 3.9. Select data analysis methods that align with the needs of the assessment project rather than relying upon methods that are most familiar. Methods may

include quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods data analysis strategies to uncover meaning in the data.

Collect

- 3.10. Critically evaluate and consider existing and emerging data collection and evidence gathering approaches (e.g., critical, decolonial, Indigenous, feminist) or other ways that resist reinforcing the hegemony of dominant, problematic methods.
- 3.11. Follow data management and handling guidelines and policies (e.g., security, access, storage, retention) as outlined by the university, the library, and/or the information technology unit, in order to protect participant privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Analyze

- 3.12. Apply appropriate methods to analyze quantitative and qualitative data which may include statistical analysis, qualitative inquiry, and other techniques.
- 3.13. Utilize appropriate tools to analyze data (e.g., Excel, SPSS, R, NVIVO).
- 3.14. Analyze data in collaboration with communities of interest when possible to minimize bias and assumptions that may otherwise be inherent in the analysis process.

4. Reflecting & Making Meaning from Results

Reflecting on and making meaning from results is critically important in library assessment work. When possible, individuals with assessment duties should collaborate with stakeholders and communities of interest to examine findings in context with the needs of the project, identify implications, and make inferences. This work enables decision-makers to determine future action, which may include additional investigation and plans to enact positive change.

Library assessment practitioners should:

Reflect

- 4.1. Reflect upon whether the techniques used to analyze and present data are appropriate and effective within a particular context.
- 4.2. Evaluate and acknowledge how one's own positionality and bias may impact the interpretation of the results.

- 4.3. Discuss and communicate limitations of the assessment, including those inherent in the design. When possible, develop and implement a course of action to address the identified limitations.

Make Meaning

- 4.4. Review results and interpret them in relation to the original goals, questions, or needs that served as the impetus for the assessment project.
- 4.5. Identify stories that are present in the data and consider what perspectives may be missing.
- 4.6. Determine whether assessment data are sufficient before making decisions or taking actions based on the results.
- 4.7. Involve stakeholders and communities of interest in the interpretation of findings when possible.
- 4.8. Ensure that conclusions are drawn explicitly from the results, not from sources external to the assessment. Conclusions should be used to respond to the questions that are the focus of study.

5. Communicating & Taking Action

Communicating and taking action on results is an essential element in creating change; providing context for decisions about change; and yielding evidence of the outcomes, impact, and value that can affect libraries, institutions, and the field at large. Successful change requires collaboration, advocacy, and partnership. Assessment practitioners bring voice to the data.

Library assessment practitioners should:

Communicate & Report

- 5.1. Select the most appropriate methods of communicating assessment results based on audience and purpose for communication.
- 5.2. Strategically communicate what has been learned in assessing outcomes to stakeholders, including participants, through varied modes and styles to ensure impact and maximum accessibility.
- 5.3. Collaborate with stakeholders and user communities to frame recommendations and actionable next steps. Communicate actions taken as a result of assessment to stakeholders and users.

Advocate & Engage the Community

- 5.4. Create customized evidence-based narratives, user stories, and strong business cases that contain clear calls-to-action and inspire stakeholders to prioritize and implement change.
- 5.5. Contextualize findings within the landscape of institutional mission and values.
- 5.6. Demystify metrics and statistics by providing clear and accessible explanations that invite audience engagement.

Collaborate & Partner

- 5.7. Intentionally build relationships between the library and user communities, especially those who have been marginalized, to co-create recommendations and solutions.
- 5.8. Collaborate and partner with individuals or groups such as institutional research; teaching, learning or research centers; information technology units; and other assessment offices.

6. Leading, Managing, & Mentoring

Leading, managing, and mentoring are important proficiencies for assessment practitioners who may or may not have positional authority in their library. Practitioners are likely to work with colleagues throughout their organizational structures with varying knowledge of assessment practices, and these skills will help the practitioner build supportive and diverse teams.

Library assessment practitioners should:

Lead & Manage

- 6.1. Act as advocates for change, work strategically with stakeholders to cultivate a shared vision for assessment, conceive assessment action plans, and design and implement an assessment program that will meet library and institutional goals.
- 6.2. Advocate for resources, support, and inclusion of the library in institutional assessment initiatives.
- 6.3. Build and manage relationships with integrity, trustworthiness, and communication. Treat assessment partners and collaborators with respect and dignity, incorporate diverse perspectives, challenge prevailing

assumptions, and demonstrate humility, self-awareness, and a willingness to learn from others.

- 6.4. Facilitate and empower teams and colleagues, guide processes, and steward resources throughout assessment projects.
- 6.5. Prioritize social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility goals wherever possible and motivate colleagues and team members to conduct equity-centered assessment.
- 6.6. Demonstrate transparency regarding the purposes, outcomes, results, and action plans resulting from assessment practices.

Mentor & Coach

- 6.7. Advise, support, educate, coach, and mentor library practitioners engaged in assessment to build assessment capacity, encourage broad engagement, and apply high quality assessment practices.
- 6.8. Mentor and recruit assessment practitioners with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- 6.9. Create formal and informal communities of practice on assessment.

Self-Check

Assessment practitioners should continuously check in with themselves and examine their own behaviors, assumptions, and practices. The following self-check questions are designed to be revisited throughout the entire assessment process from project inception to completion. They are intended to help practitioners develop awareness about themselves and others, identify what is working well, uncover opportunities for adjustment and improvement, and stay actively engaged and present in their assessment activities.

- 1. Have I examined and followed the values and ethics that guide my work and align to my institution, overall and in specific assessment projects?
- 2. Have I centered social justice, equity, diversity, and accessibility into assessment practices in an effort to maximize benefits for all populations?
- 3. What is my relationship or positionality to this work? Have I considered my power, biases, and privilege when working with others? What actions do I need to take to ensure equity in my work?

4. Have I critically examined my assessment practices to minimize harm? Have I protected the safety of participants by following best practices in privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity?
5. Have I been inclusive in all phases of my assessment design, deployment, development of conclusions and recommendations, and in my communications in order to ensure that impacted users and communities are active participants in and benefit from resulting decisions and actions?
6. What are my knowledge and experience gaps? What learning opportunities are available that could help fill these gaps? Am I engaging in ongoing professional development throughout my assessment career?

Working Group Members

The Assessment Proficiencies Working Group was composed of individuals from both academic libraries and higher education assessment communities who have expertise in equity-centered assessment. Working group members participated in multiple ways, including conducting literature and environmental scans, organizing or participating in focus groups and interviews, drafting and revising the *Proficiencies*, and serving as expert reviewers.

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Bibliography and Suggested Readings

The bibliography is available via this separate PDF link and includes resources that the working group consulted as well as select resources recommended by reviewers.

<https://tinyurl.com/ProficienciesBibliography>