

# **Models of Embedded Librarianship**

## **Final Report**

Prepared under the Special Libraries Association Research Grant 2007

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June 30, 2009

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to thank the Special Libraries Association Research Committee and its chairperson, Dr. Eileen Abels, for their guidance and wisdom throughout this project.

We would also like to thank John Latham, SLA Information Center Director, who was our staff liaison. John was unfailingly responsive to our many questions, and provided much good counsel as we progressed.

Our Graduate Research Assistants, Acacia Reed and Carla Miller, were enthusiastic and capable. Carla's assistance in compilation of the final content analysis and bibliography was invaluable.

## Executive Summary

This report documents an eighteen month research project, “Models of Embedded Librarianship”, which was carried out from January 2008 to June 2009, and funded by the Special Libraries Association under its Research Grant program.

The term “embedded librarianship” is widely used in the professional literature. It describes a variety of service innovations in a variety of organizational settings. It is used to describe the work of an academic librarian who participates in an academic course on an ongoing basis, teaching information literacy skills. It encompasses the work of librarians in a research institute or corporation whose offices are moved from a central library to their customer groups, so that they can work more closely with the members of those groups. It includes the role of a medical librarian who goes on “rounds” and participates in clinical care teams.

In this project, we sought to gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences among embedded library service programs, and to develop insights into practices that enable them to succeed. Our project had four goals:

- To define criteria of “embeddedness” for library and information service programs
- To define indicators of success and identify successful (model) programs
- To collect data about the practices followed by model programs in initiating, operating, and evaluating their services
- To develop recommendations for other librarians seeking to implement embedded services.

To achieve these goals, we conducted two surveys, made four site visits to embedded library service providers, and monitored the professional literature. The membership of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) was defined as the population for the study.

We found that embedded library services are widespread among the SLA membership. Forty-five percent of respondents who provide direct library and information services to information users in an organization said they deliver specialized services to one or more groups. Embedded services were found to be widespread among all organization types and industry sectors in the study. They were most prevalent in larger organizations.

Embedded librarians (those providing specialized services) were not sharply distinguished from their non-embedded peers in ways that we expected. Librarians providing specialized services are more likely than others to receive funding from their customers. However, they are not more likely to be located with customer groups, nor are they more likely to be supervised by a non-library manager.

Given the limited differences in funding, location, and supervision, we focused the subsequent stages of the study on all those who provide specialized services within their organizations. These we considered “embedded librarians.” These librarians report a range of activities that strengthen their relationships with their customer groups and their knowledge of their customers’ work. The following seven were cited by more than 50% of the embedded librarians responding:

- Collaborated on or contributed to your customer group's work
- Met more than once with a few regular customers to discuss information needs and present results to them
- Provided training on information resources or information management tools away from library facilities, such as in a customer's office, a conference room, or classroom
- Met (in person or virtually) with senior members (e.g., executives, managers, supervisors) of your customer group to discuss information-related needs and services
- Attended a meeting, class, or conference devoted to your customers' area of expertise (not oriented to librarians)
- Attended your customer group(s)' meetings to learn about their work and information needs
- Collaborated on or contributed to your customer group's electronic communications and/or collaborative workspaces, including email, wikis, blogs, and other web-based workspaces.

We also found that librarians who are co-located with their customers and receive funding from their customers tend to do more of these activities than other librarians.

Embedded librarians have background in both librarianship and in the subject matter important to their customer groups. We found that 84% hold an ALA-accredited Master's in Library or Information Science. Forty-four percent also hold a Bachelor's degree in a field relevant to their customers, and 23% hold a relevant advanced degree. (Some respondents may hold both a Bachelor's and an advanced degree relevant to their customers' work.) Embedded librarians also have extensive relevant informal education and practical experience: 50% report having more than five years' work experience in a field related to their customers' work, and 78% have attended relevant classes or conferences. Embedded librarians overwhelmingly report that their employers provide some form of support for their continuing education, and we found no significant relationships between the level of librarians' subject experience and their educational activities. Continuous learning is important to embedded librarians across the board.

Embedded librarians tend to provide complex, value-added services to their customer groups, but in many cases they also continue to provide basic library services as well. The following were performed by over 50% of respondents:

- Training on the use of information services
- Ready reference, quick fact checking, citation verification
- In-depth topical research

- Information resource development (such as evaluating resources, negotiating with vendors, etc.)
- Current awareness, news alerting
- Produce electronic or print “how to” manuals, pathfinders, etc.
- Evaluating, synthesizing summarizing the literature
- Content management for web, intranet and wiki sites
- Sharing instructional responsibility (such as participating with subject faculty in a classroom instruction)

The embedded library services model is widely distributed across different organization types and industry sectors. We found that embedded services tend to occur more frequently in larger organizations (those with over 500 employees), and that over half of embedded services programs have been in existence for 10 years or more. As noted previously, among all direct service providers, 45% reported that they provide specialized services to specific groups – our definition of “embedded librarianship.” Academic librarians are significantly more likely to say they provide embedded services, but government, corporate, and nonprofit organizations also report widespread adoption of this model. Similarly, educational institutions were the largest industry segment, but legal services, financial services, professional services, and media organizations accounted for roughly equal percentages of the embedded library service providers in the study. In six sectors, more than half of service providers reported that they are embedded. These sectors are:

- Education
- Financial services
- Information services
- Technology
- Biomedical and pharmaceutical
- Media

We did find some differences in the nature of embedded services and activities of embedded librarians across organization types. In particular, academic librarians are more likely to provide training on information resources in non-library locations, and appear to engage in fewer relationship-building activities.

Having explored the individual and organizational characteristics of embedded librarians, we defined criteria for the selection of successful programs, and studied factors that differentiated successful programs from others. Our criteria for success included an increase in the number of librarians providing services to the customer group; an increase in demand for services from the customer group; and an increase in the number of different services provided to the group. We identified eleven respondents who had experienced increases in all three, and sixteen who had not experienced increases in any.

Twenty-two factors were identified that differentiated the two groups. We categorized these factors into four themes:

- **Marketing and promotion:** successful programs are more likely to benefit from word of mouth advertising; use printed promotional materials; and give presentations at new employee orientations.
- **Service evaluation:** successful programs are more likely to measure outcomes in financial terms; to use their metrics as justification for the continuance of their embedded services; to collect anecdotes about their services; and to count research projects, documents delivered, reference questions, and attendance at training sessions.
- **Services provided:** successful programs are more likely to provide sophisticated, value-added services, specifically in-depth research, competitive intelligence, training away from library facilities, sharing of instructional responsibility with subject faculty, and data analysis. They are also more likely to provide document delivery services.
- **Management support:** successful programs were more likely to be established without needing approval from organization management; to benefit from the customer group manager's participation in integrating the librarian into the customer group; and to have the customer group provide input to the librarian's performance review. They were more likely to have a written agreement for the service delivery; to have the authorization of the library manager to initiate services; and to require the embedded librarian to participate in continuing education.

In conclusion, we find that embedded library services are widespread and effective. Successful embedded librarians are excellent relationship-builders, with strong knowledge of their customers' work, and they deliver highly sophisticated, value-added services.

We are concerned that current programs depend too much on the excellence of individual librarians. We recommend that many library managers renew their efforts to lead and support embedded librarians, taking five specific actions:

1. Hire library services staff who can build relationships
2. Enable them to learn about the parent organization and the subject domain of their customers
3. Empower them to identify and offer the services that their customers need most
4. Build manager-to-manager alliances and communicate effectively with customer managers
5. Support the embedded librarian's work by enabling them to reach back into the central library staff for support and to share knowledge with other embedded librarians in the organization; by promoting embedded services effectively; and by systematically evaluating embedded services.