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Survey Says Libraries Struggle to Match Supply, Demand in Wellness Initiatives

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Previous analyses of the 2007 Library Workplace Wellness online survey established a link between availability of and employee participation in workplace wellness initiatives: the greater the number of programs an employer offers, the greater the number of programs in which employees participate. But further analysis complicates this model. This third installment of *Library Worklife's* analysis of this survey examines not only which initiatives are most commonly offered in each library type but also which offerings are most popular among workers. Of particular interest are wellness initiatives that are rarely offered but are highly popular, or initiatives that are commonly offered but suffer low participation. *Interpretation of this data in terms of supply and demand sheds light on a number of questions:* which initiatives are most commonly offered in each type of library, and what does this data reveal about priorities and funding capabilities in these respective institutions? Which programs are most popular among employees in each type, and what can these trends tell us about employee needs in each type of library?

Of the 2,524 respondents, 976 work in academic libraries, 1,316 work in public, 79 work in special libraries and 148 work in other. Because the respondents were allowed to choose more than one initiative, the total number of initiatives selected often exceeds the number of respondents. For example, in response to the question, "Which of these workplace wellness activities does your library offer? Check as many as apply," 2,524 respondents selected 7,636 initiatives. When asked, "Do you take advantage of any of these activities?" the 2,524 respondents selected 3,244 initiatives.

Academic

According to the conclusion drawn by the last article, the average academic library worker participates in two (1.64) workplace wellness initiatives. Table 1 below demonstrates that, on average, any given wellness program offered by academic libraries will see a 41% participation rate. However, when we break down the analysis by initiative, it becomes apparent that some programs are significantly more popular than others: in Table 1 we see that among academic library workers, the participation rate in alternative work schedule programs is nearly ten times as high as that in onsite childcare/childcare subsidies.

As we see below, the most popular worklife initiatives among academic workers are alternate work schedules, health screenings and employee-administered flu shots. The least utilized are Employee Assistance Plans, a compressed work week and onsite/subsidized childcare.

Generally, the participation in programs offered by academic libraries stays within 20 points of the average of 41%. In other words, supply largely follows demand; these libraries tend to provide the types of programs that employees utilize. One exception is the participation rate in onsite/subsidized childcare, which at 6.9% is significantly lower than other programs offered by academic libraries. This

data suggests that academic libraries should examine childcare programs to make them more attractive to employees. Although participation rates appear to be low, in fact, the presence of onsite/subsidized childcare indicates the effects of demographic, geographic and economic rationales for serving library employees who are parents with young children.

It may be the case with less popular initiatives that their audience is smaller, though no less important. It also is worth noting that the survey could not ascertain which programs are most appreciated, only those that are most utilized. These are the difficult balances that human resources personnel grapple with in structuring workplace wellness offerings. Another issue outside of the scope of this study is the costs associated with providing each of these services, to both employers and employees.

Table 1—Academic Library Employee Participation in Workplace Wellness Initiatives

Initiative	Offered	Participants	Participation Rate
Alternative work schedule	382	240	62.83%
Health screenings (encouraged to get screenings for diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, etc.)	286	154	53.85%
Flu shot given at work	480	254	52.92%
Work release for continuing education	424	203	47.88%
Wellness classes (stress relief, time management, diet/nutrition, smoking cessation, CPR, etc.)	376	174	46.28%
Telecommuting	115	50	43.48%
Leave allowed for children's school functions	228	77	33.77%
On-site exercise classes	275	87	31.64%

On-site exercise facilities	392	123	31.38%
Job sharing	42	13	30.95%
Discounts or subsidies for gym membership	237	73	30.80%
Employee Assistance Plans (EAP)	407	114	28.01%
Compressed work week	138	28	20.29%
Childcare on-site or subsidies	116	8	6.90%
Grand Total	3898	1598	41.00%

Public

On average, any given wellness program offered by public libraries will see a 46.92% participation rate, nearly 6% higher than that found in academic libraries. And though the popularity among initiatives varies, it does not vary as widely as the participation rate in academic libraries: the participation rates of the most popular initiatives, on-site exercise classes and telecommuting (tying at 75%) are only four times as popular as the least utilized (job sharing at 17.54%).

Perhaps more telling is the discrepancy between the number of programs offered and the number of participants. Only 28 respondents report that their employers offer on-site exercise classes, while over 20 times that number of respondents offer Employee Assistance Plans, the initiative most commonly offered by public libraries. In fact, three of the four most popular initiatives are three of the four least commonly offered (telecommuting, on-site exercise classes and on-site exercise facilities, at 52, 28 and 22 respectively, rank just above on-site/subsidized childcare, a program reported by only 7 out of 1,316 respondents). And many of the most commonly offered programs are among the least utilized; though Employee Assistance plans are reported by 577 respondents, it is among the three least popular programs.

It is possible that public libraries are unable to offer some of the programs most desired by participants. On-site exercise facilities are beyond the budgets of many public libraries. But others are well within the reach of many public employers; many exercise classes require little more than an open space (like an empty conference or reading room), and some libraries that offer 24 hour online reference help could possibly allow greater flexibility in telecommuting. The fact that many of the most desired programs are not, yet could be, available to public employees indicates that public libraries should be made aware of employee desires for flexibility, both in body and in commute.

Table 2—Public Library Employee Participation in Workplace Wellness Initiatives

Initiative	Offered	Participation	%
On-site exercise classes	28	21	75.00%
Telecommuting	52	39	75.00%
Alternative work schedule	235	151	64.26%
On-site exercise facilities	22	14	63.64%
Health screenings (encouraged to get screenings for diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, etc.)	274	171	62.41%
Wellness classes (stress relief, time management, diet/nutrition, smoking cessation, CPR, etc.)	270	160	59.26%
Childcare on-site or subsidies	7	4	57.14%
Work release for continuing education	329	177	53.80%
Flu shot given at work	440	229	52.05%
Compressed work week	74	36	48.65%
Leave allowed for children's school functions	273	102	37.36%

Employee Assistance Plans (EAP)	577	177	30.68%
Discounts or subsidies for gym membership	265	71	26.79%
Job sharing	57	10	17.54%
Grand Total	2903	1362	46.92%

Special

Table 3 below demonstrates that, on average, any given wellness program offered by special libraries will see a 46.56% participation rate. Enjoying the highest participation rate are wellness classes, health screenings and work release for continuing education. The least utilized are on-site exercise classes, on-site/subsidized childcare and job sharing.

As is the case with public libraries, special libraries apparently struggle to match supply to demand. The initiative that elicits the highest participation rates, the wellness class, is among the five programs least commonly offered. And though the most commonly offered initiative, flu shots offered at work, sees a participation rate slightly higher than average (52.38% to 46.56%), the participation rate of the second most offered program (Employee Assistance Plan) is well under the average (36.59% to 46.56%). As was mentioned earlier, the desire, need, costs and weight of less popular initiatives cannot be strictly measured by how they compare with services that would naturally appeal to a larger segment of employees.

Please note that response from special library employees was significantly lower than that from academic, public and even “other” libraries (79 to 976, 1,316 and 148, respectively). Because it was drawn from a smaller pool of respondents, this data may not be as representative as that from other types of libraries.

Table 3— Special Library Employee Participation in Workplace Wellness Initiatives

Initiative	Offered	Participation	%
Wellness classes (stress relief, time management, diet/nutrition, smoking cessation, CPR, etc.)	14	12	85.71%
Health screenings (encouraged to get screenings for diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, etc.)	20	15	75.00%

Work release for continuing education	26	16	61.54%
Alternative work schedule	28	16	57.14%
Flu shot given at work	42	22	52.38%
Compressed work week	10	5	50.00%
Telecommuting	7	3	42.86%
Employee Assistance Plans (EAP)	41	15	36.59%
On-site exercise facilities	14	5	35.71%
Leave allowed for children's school functions	15	5	33.33%
Discounts or subsidies for gym membership	17	4	23.53%
On-site exercise classes	18	3	16.67%
Childcare on-site or subsidies	7	1	14.29%
Job sharing	3	0	0.00%
Grand Total	262	122	46.56%

Other

Table 4 indicates that, on average, any given wellness program offered by “other” libraries will see a 48.05% participation rate. Library workers who define employers as “other” are most likely to take advantage of alternative work schedules, telecommuting and health screenings. They are least likely to utilize Employee Assistance Plans, on-site exercise facilities and on-site/subsidized childcare.

With a few exceptions, “other” libraries seem to be able to match supply and demand of workplace wellness initiatives. One notable mismatch is telecommuting; this initiative comes in a close second in demand, but ranks near the bottom in supply. On the other end of the spectrum is the Employee Assistance Plan, which is the second most offered and the third least utilized.

When reviewing data from “other” libraries, please note that “other” served as a catch-all category for respondents who did not define their employers as academic, public or special. A large percentage of these respondents, in an open-ended question, identified their employers as school libraries. Due to the assortment of employers identified as other, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the priorities and funding capabilities in these respective institutions.

Table 4—Other Library Employee Participation in Workplace Wellness Initiatives

Initiative	Offered	Participation	%
Alternative work schedule	29	20	68.97%
Telecommuting	16	11	68.75%
Health screenings (encouraged to get screenings for diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, etc.)	26	17	65.38%
Flu shot given at work	60	36	60.00%
Work release for continuing education	43	25	58.14%
Discounts or subsidies for gym membership	18	9	50.00%
On-site exercise classes	7	3	42.86%

Wellness classes (stress relief, time management, diet/nutrition, smoking cessation, CPR, etc.)	22	9	40.91%
Leave allowed for children's school functions	30	12	40.00%
Compressed work week	10	3	30.00%
Job sharing	10	3	30.00%
Employee Assistance Plans (EAP)	44	9	20.45%
On-site exercise facilities	11	2	18.18%
Childcare on-site or subsidies	7	1	14.29%
Grand Total	333	160	48.05%

It's worth repeating that may be the case with less popular initiatives that their audience is smaller, though no less important. It is worth noting again that the survey could not illuminate which programs are most appreciated, only those that are most utilized. Human resources personnel have the tough job of justifying the expenses associated with workplace wellness offerings. Another issue outside of the scope of this study is the costs associated with providing each of these services, to both employers and employees.

We are excited to explore the results of this important survey, and the next issue of *Library Worklife* will conclude the discussion. April's article will discuss responses to the survey's open-ended questions. These questions include:

- Do staff in your library collaborate on activities, like walking clubs and healthy potlucks? Please describe.
- If your library does not offer any of these activities, why do you think this is the case?
- Do you think these activities are important? Why or why not?

The article will discuss how responses to these questions complicate and reinforce the quantitative data. All articles in this series will be available on the ALA-APA website on the [Salaries](#) page.

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We would love to have your **feedback on this article!**

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