

## Demonstrating value by measuring your success: the power of an audit

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### **Abstract**

Creating value is central to success, and auditing serves as a key change management activity for demonstrating and measuring your library's service impact and overall business performance. As the foundation of any quality improvement initiative, audits provide objective, systematic, and data-driven insights into all aspects of library operations. They help pinpoint areas for improvement, identify risks, ensure compliance with internal policies and external regulations, reinforce accountability, and demonstrate leadership. Regular audits across your library's service delivers real-time, user centric data that will inform smarter decision-making, streamline workflows, and strengthen the library's ability to adapt and respond to change.

"The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge"  
~Stephen Hawking 2001

### **Measuring what matters – library bench to bedside**

Within a resource-constrained hospital environment, health librarians face mounting pressure to meet rising clinical, research, and organisational demands. We need to continually demonstrate our unique value proposition and how we transition that value into our organisations' strategic and operational plans, whilst encapsulating and responding to the broader consumer groups' needs such as our clinicians,

patients, and their families. It is not disputed that in evidence-based practice organisations like hospitals and health services information that builds knowledge capacity is a valuable commodity (Woldring 2001; Mueller 2025). So how can we deliver on these expectations, reduce the pressure, demonstrate our commitment to quality improvement, and balance the challenge of managing continuous change.

One option may be by taking an audit approach to selective activities to identify where improvement is needed. This measure, coupled with actively obtaining feedback, leads to positive business improvements and meaningful strategic alignment – that is, measuring what matters and building a culture of assessment. An audit is a key feature of an integrated continuous quality improvement cycle involving measurements of effectiveness against agreed and proven quality standards.

A compliance audit may be conducted as part of a change management process to identify what the services' appropriating resources (fiscal, human, subscription, physical and other resources) are being utilised. It can identify areas of efficiency, efficacy and in some cases redundancy. Effectively, it is about identifying the gap between what does happen and what is supposed to happen. It provides a clear picture of the relationship between your resources and outcomes in a library business context.

The philosophy underpinning the audit (review) approach is really to establish a feedback mechanism to gather evidence to help plan and demonstrate value, impact, and success (quantitative to qualitative), which can then define what is best practice. Auditing may be part of your current business practice and already embedded in your continuous improvement focus however it is often not supported with feedback. In this challenging climate of constant change coupled with the dearth of legislative, governance and best practice guidelines, having a compliance checklist may prove to be an important tool to help prompt, promote and prove that your library service is constantly measuring what matters, and demonstrating that good governance is at the forefront of your business practices.

### **Drivers of change – role of auditing**

Libraries do not operate in isolation and the impact of change in the broader business does directly influence our ability to provide our services. In the Australian healthcare system, we work within the complexities of multi-level structures that form a dynamic system of interconnected parts (Ritchie 2026). Our compliance landscape therefore is equally dynamic and consists of State/Federal legislation; health department regulations; hospital and local public health unit (LPHU) policies; and our own library industry guidelines (Ritchie 2022). This complexity requires our audit to demonstrate: our leadership, as librarians; our understanding and awareness of the regulatory environment in which we operate; and acceptance of our

responsibilities to manage fiscal performance and human resources output and behaviours. In essence we are an evidence-based practice.

We can only manage what is within our control, so to demonstrate we are 'worth every cent and more' (HLI 2013) we need to investigate and understand how our executive leadership measures return-on-investment in both quantifiable and qualifiable terms. The motivation for developing this tool is the hope that it will spark new ideas and guide initiatives on how, as a sector, we manage change and for whom that change is intended - the stakeholder audience.

Stakeholders could be:

- **Management** – new line manager suggests a percentage cut to all subscriptions as a strategy to mitigate rising costs and balance the budget. What evidence can we draw on to inform an appropriate response?
- **Senior Executives**– want clarity, numbers, and alignment with organisational goals. What evidence can we provide to demonstrate our significant contribution to research output and to hospital accreditation?
- **Legal Counsel** – Legal look for risk mitigation, documented processes, and evidence of compliance behaviours. What evidence can we provide to demonstrate how we ensure compliance with: changes to the Copyright Act; how we educate users, or how we manage organisational change in response to updates to the Work Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) regulations?
- **Finance** – Finance teams look for assurance, auditability, and risk-free procurement processes. Can we demonstrate that all contracts and licences follow the correct delegation of authority, are reviewed and lodged with Legal Counsel, and are stored in the organisation's central contract repository?
- **Research** – Research teams value expertise, risk reduction, and process clarity. How can you demonstrate that the library can be a trusted partner due to our unique, independent, and in-depth understanding of research ethics and processes? Evidencing our skill set positions us to provide informed advice on copyright, Creative Commons licensing, and related intellectual property queries.
- **People & Culture, Governance Executives** – look for evidence of professional legitimacy, regulatory alignment, and organisational safety. How do we evidence our scope of practice? Librarians engage in ongoing professional development aligned with the ALIA HLA Competencies, uphold strong equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles, and operate under a robust ethical code of practice (ALIA 2024).

### **Structuring an effective audit – Value Checklist Tool**

A strong health library value assessment looks at far more than usage statistics — it must capture strategic impact, compliance, cost-effectiveness, and contributions to clinical and organisational outcomes. Can we demonstrate that "an hour in the library is worth a month in the laboratory" (Dance 2026)?

Health Libraries Australia has designed a Value Checklist Tool to help health libraries and librarians systematically collect evidence to demonstrate the success and value of their services. This practical tool provides a framework for:

- Tracking progress on the implementation of new services
- Ensuring observance of codes of conduct
- Demonstrating conformity with standards of practice
- Monitoring compliance with new legislative requirements, as well as with organisational and library industry policies, procedures, or guidelines.

The Health Library Value Checklist tool can be found on the ALIA Health Libraries Australia website: <https://hla.alia.org.au/alia-hla-library-compliance-checklist/>.

The tool recognises that there are many approaches to effecting change and measuring quality or continuous improvement. It can be used for internal audit (self-assessment) or external audit (appointed assessor) (Ritchie 2020). External audit may involve but is not limited to:

- ACSQH's (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health) NSQHS (National Safety and Quality in Health Services) assessors for hospital accreditation (Gaca 2024)
- PMC (Postgraduate Medical Council) compliance with the provision of key educational resources (Siemensma 2023)
- OH&S inspection team from your hospital or health institution.

The tool is intended as a flexible guide, encouraging libraries to cultivate a culture of regular monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. By using this checklist, health libraries can more effectively assess their performance, support evidence-based decision-making, and showcase their impact within their organisations (Zaugg 2022; Bennett 2025).

Three pre-populated worksheets are included to help you:

1. Organise compliance activities into relevant categories for your service
2. Define measurable, manageable tasks and actions that can be tracked, allowing you to record progress and demonstrate evidence of compliance
3. Utilise a feedback monitoring tool with sample questions to collect evidence of successful compliance, based on stakeholder input

#### 1. **Compliance Categories/Activities:**

Conducting an audit is a valuable quality improvement activity to measure a library's service impact and business success. Compliance categories are suggestions to help you identify areas for monitoring improvement and demonstrating compliance. Matching the categories to operational objectives of your organisation helps with translation.

#### 2. **Task/Action progress overview**

Collecting data in a consistent format at regular, scheduled intervals provides

a clear understanding of how your resources relate to outcomes within a library business context. Activities may involve ongoing engagements comprised of a series of actions or steps. Maintaining a record of key legislation, licenses, standards, organisational policies, procedures, and guidelines that directly impact your service and inform your business decisions demonstrates a best practice approach.

### 3. **Feedback and assessment**

Regularly auditing your library services allows you to gather real-time data that will inform and enhance future decision-making, support change implementation, and streamline processes and practices. Soliciting feedback on specific actions taken to achieve compliance can help demonstrate progress and guide further improvements. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and reporting are essential for governance and accountability. By establishing standard measurement criteria - whether against industry standards, local policies, or other benchmarks - the library can assess whether the skills and resources provided to users are effectively utilised. This approach also highlights any gaps between perceived and actual service delivery and knowledge, enabling targeted strategies to better meet user needs.

Designing and implementing effective audit and feedback models that maximise improvement while minimising unintended consequences is important and is a challenge. Gathering feedback is simply collecting and connecting with customers. Having a conversation is a very effective way of gathering information. Listening is a proactive way to ensure that you never stray too far from the needs of your user community, even as those needs evolve (and needs always evolve). Insights from the service desk – this can be a powerful idea generation space that can help chart a path forward or gain intel on why the path you are on is vulnerable or valuable to retain.

A key metric regarding feedback is to measure engagement; such as impact on user information literacy, student engagement, or clinical research. As no two health services are the same, the priorities for all libraries will differ.

Feedback and assessment focus could fall into a variety of categories:

- **Task compliance:** can be assessed through a range of methods, including reflective question-based surveys, focus groups, customer service interactions, social media monitoring, feedback forms, follow-up emails, and informal conversations. Together, these touchpoints build a picture of user engagement and the impact of our activities. A simple OH&S compliance example is assessing whether library staff and users are aware of, and can easily locate, the displayed fire evacuation procedures.

- **Focus Area:** these assessments examine library services, resources, staff performance, and the effectiveness of physical and digital spaces. For example, a spot walk-around survey that captures who is using the library and for what purpose provides a richer measure of engagement than a simple door count.
- **Activity Purpose:** The purpose of these assessments is to justify continued funding, strengthen decision-making, and demonstrate the library's contribution to organisational priorities such as research success and quality improvement. For example, by hosting the organisation's research repository, the library becomes a visible part of the research lifecycle and enhances the exposure of institutional outputs, supporting impact measures such as Google Scholar and Altmetric scores.

In a health service setting, regular audits are standard practice. Engaging in auditing practice does not mean you need to measure all activities, all the time. An audit is best done when there is a need to respond to change or to assess or test the value of an existing service (Bennett 2025; Ivers 2025). Audits are not about ticking boxes – they are about uncovering the story of your library's impact and making it visible to stakeholders. It is about being proactive and prepared – rather than waiting until the wolf is at the door!

### **Best practice – responding to change**

In a hospital and health care setting, regular audits are standard practice. As part of this organisational structure, the library's management approach should be no different.

Collecting data for auditing does not have to cover every activity or task. It can target key areas, like budget impact or how we align with new organisational initiatives. It does not need to be done retrospectively, rather it can be built over time. Once you have decided on the priority initiative then you can consider what activities, tasks/actions, feedback and assessment can be implemented within current resourcing.

Change always creates a gap. Audits are how we find that gap, measure it, and close it. An audit is a compass, a dashboard, or a health-check. With a clear measuring mechanism in place, we can stay on track, pinpoint priorities for improvement, guide and manage change, demonstrate professionalism, provide credible performance data, and above all show compliance with regulations, policies, and standards. This is how you measure, in the context of your organisation, and demonstrate that you are engaged in best practices.

## **Benefits – embracing change**

Careful stewardship of resources enables us to continually reinvest in our services, facilities, staff, clinicians, and patients. We need to place a renewed focus on sustainability and learn to do more with the resources at our disposal.

Managing growing costs effectively is what will enable us to continue meeting the needs of our library communities, and protect the health system we belong to for the future. To do this requires responsibility and innovation at every level and in every part of our services, so that resources are prioritised, budgets are balanced, and efficiencies are developed.

Implementing an audit checklist is indispensable for several reasons:

- **Increased efficiency:** An audit checklist is a pre-planning activity that can help streamline tasks and activity scheduling, reducing time due to the speed an audit can be prepared and conducted. If the audit can be automated, tasks like scheduling and reporting will free up time that staff can use to focus on more strategic activities.
- **Enhanced compliance:** In semi-regulated industries like libraries, an audit helps ensure compliance with legislation such as Copyright; OH&S regulations; licences such as Creative Commons or publisher subscription contracts. Gathering feedback in real-time provides an alert for any potential non-compliance, reducing regulatory and other risks.
- **Improved accuracy and risk management:** Structured thematic data collection and break down of compliance activities, with measurable actions and outcomes will improve data collection and analysis, making audits more thorough and precise. Priority ranking will help identify high-risk areas and demonstrate you are addressing compliance gaps proactively.
- **Cost savings:** Library can demonstrate cost savings by improving efficiency, early identification of potential risks, reducing errors, that may lead to fines or penalties due to non-compliance.
- **Real-time insights:** Utilising advanced reporting and dashboards can provide immediate visibility into audit progress, enabling faster decision-making and corrective actions to prevent minor issues from becoming major problems.

## **Barriers, limits, initiatives**

*“Many of us have seen programs come and go – some ineffective, some full of potential and some genuinely changing people's lives. Too often, the program or its impact wasn't sustained because the systems around them – the people, technology, funding, incentives, politics – weren't ready or able to support long-term success.”*

*~Wanrooy (Feb 2026) APO Update*

A challenge we face in the health setting is the value our services bring to our organisation is often indirect, delayed, or harder to quantify. We know our work does

contribute to patient care but the link is often through a clinician making-a-decision, based on the information, evidence, or advice we have provided.

We need to move beyond traditional volume-based models to value based. Models that prioritise what our users perceive as value outcomes in a cost-effective way within the limits that are imposed. Barriers present themselves in a variety of ways and may vary within library services. Economic limits, legal ambiguities, organisations being slow to adopt or adapt, rapid change and uncertainty, staff training, and educational requirements.

However barriers can be managed more effectively if measured. If we consider the adoption of new technology into our libraries such as artificial intelligence (AI) tools, some of the barriers may be:

- **Rapid change & uncertainty:** AI evolves faster than training and policy can keep pace
- **Ethics & misinformation:** Risks around privacy, bias, accuracy, misappropriation of resources, copyright, and research integrity
- **Staff buy-in/hesitation:** Fear of change or job loss, and low adoption readiness
- **Resource & policy gaps:** Limited funding, tools, guidelines, time, and skill and expertise
- **Training needs:** Demand for practical, targeted, responsible AI education
- **Organisational constraints:** Slow leadership, policy hurdles, economic limits, and regulatory ambiguities.

In essence – we are not alone; we do not need to reinvent the wheel - however measuring and monitoring how often librarians contribute to the organisation's governance will help avoid and predict potential business risks. It does require taking responsibility and innovation at every level and within every part of the service so that resources are prioritised, budgets are balanced and efficiencies are developed. This demonstrates positive operational compliance toward change that you have led and implement; a noteworthy value statement.

### **In summary - recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on standard industry audit processes (AASV 2024) adapted as generalised statements for library health services. They may be helpful when considered in the context of the libraries individual home entity and affiliated governance structures.

- Implementing an audit checklist will help the library stay compliant with relevant laws and regulations by recording activities and completed tasks - real-time data to avoid real-time risk
- It is essential for measuring the library's value contribution to organisational success or impact of a specific project

- It helps set clear and measurable goals and identify areas of improvement or service gaps
- The library will be actively collecting data that can be used as metrics to demonstrate success against external and internal compliance requirements
- An audit value checklist can provide an opportunity for standardisation and consistency. The tool can demonstrate how an individual service, or a network of health libraries contribute to organisational success, evidence-based decision making and patient care outcomes

### **Conclusion – building a compliance culture**

Library value assessment is a systematic, data-driven process that measures a library's impact, return-on-investment, and contribution to its parent organisation and community. By drawing on both qualitative methods (such as surveys and focus groups) and quantitative indicators (including usage data and economic impact measures), these assessments justify ongoing funding, inform service improvements, and demonstrate the library's continuing relevance to key stakeholders - our broader health service, the clinical workforce, and the consumers we ultimately serve: patients and their families.

Measuring our value and adopting a continuous improvement philosophy as part of our service delivery is a sustainable team habit and ultimately will turn invisible work into undeniable evidence. An audit is less an inspection and more a spotlight on library and librarians as information specialists, knowledge managers, and tangible value creators. Like a mirror it will show your service as it really is, the true impact, and demonstrate that the services value proposition cannot be denied.

Ultimately, accountability is everyone's business. Audits turn intention into action, we do not just build a compliance culture within our teams, we lead, improve, and define best practice with irrefutable evidence.

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Michele consults as an Informationist for the Melbourne Medical School, University of Melbourne, and contributes as an Honorary Senior Fellow for Departments of Surgery & Critical Care, Austin Health Precinct, University of Melbourne. She has built a diverse career as an Information/Knowledge Manager, holding senior leadership positions across hospital, university, public and private sectors. Her expertise lies in research-driven, evidence-based organisations within the fields of environment, health, science, and technology. Michele's audit experience stems directly from her role as Manager, Knowledge Centre, Ernst & Young Australia within the professional services sector and her years in managing library services across many industries. Passionate about driving continuous education and development, Michele focuses on building information services that inspire people to challenge themselves, learn and grow. Currently Michele also contributes to ALIA membership in the role of National Manager, Health Libraries Australia.