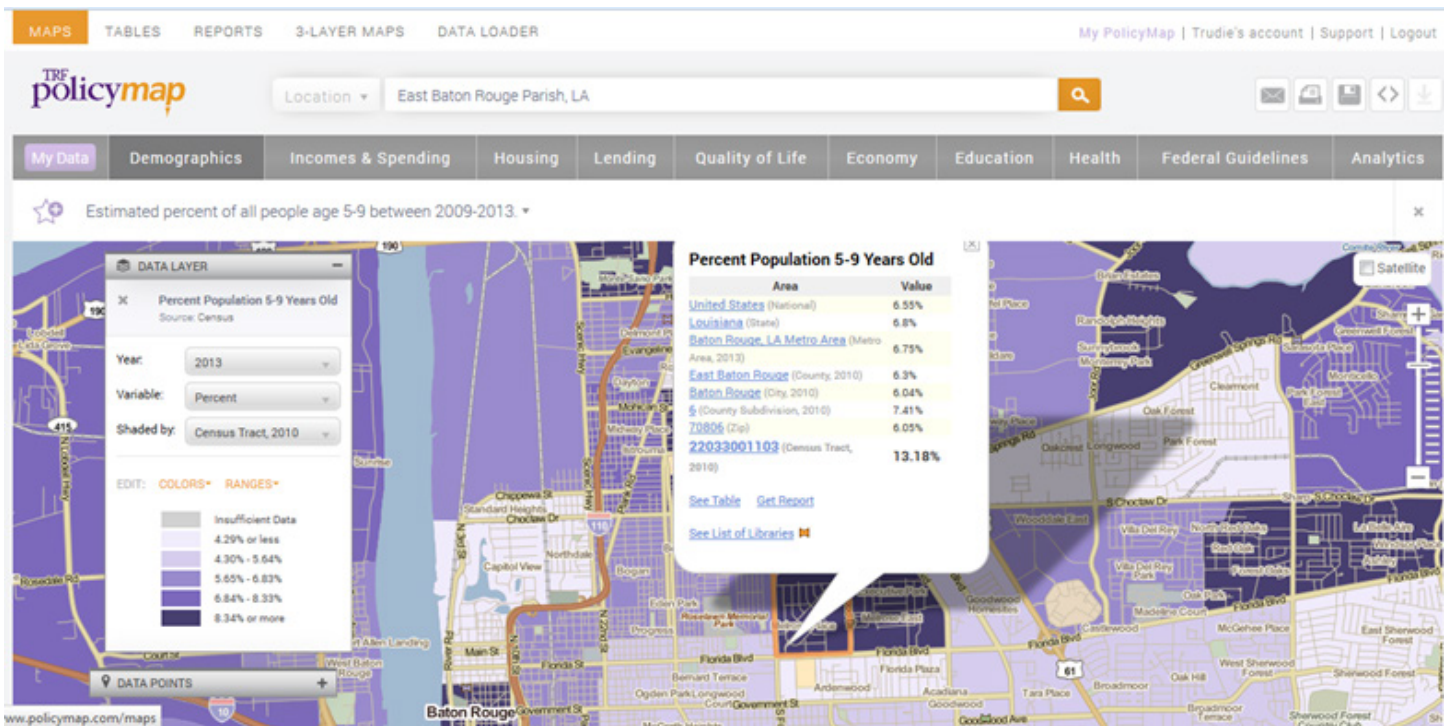


Data Mapping: Who Needs It?

» The visual display of community demographics helps libraries meet the needs of internal and external constituents.



BY TRUDIE THOMAS

Online mapping enables government, commercial, non-profit, and academic institutions to access data about communities and markets across the United States. Through web-based geographic information systems, users can analyze large amounts of data to produce maps, tables, charts, and reports.

Data on thousands of indicators such as demographics, lending, housing, income and spending, quality of life, education, jobs, health, and federal programs can be accessed independently or through services, such as PolicyMap, that provide online software.

DATA MAPPING AND LIBRARIES

Academic libraries are a natural fit for including data mapping software in their offerings, and the results are used by faculty and students in course work and for research. Mapping software allows users to

focus on analyzing data, not on collecting it. The data has also been used by academic library administrators to assist with development projects, community engagement, and grant writing.

More recently, public libraries have learned that data mapping can be a valuable tool for decision making in various library contexts and for providing valuable information for community partners.

EAST BATON ROUGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

With a staff of more than 540 employees, Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish Library System (EBRPL) has been an important community resource for 75 years and has received numerous national and state awards. EBRPL operates under the control of the City/Parish government and at the direction of the Library Board of Control, which is appointed by the Metropolitan Council. Assistant Director Mary Stein has been with EBRPL for 30 years and is passionate about

helping her community, from patrons and organizations served by the local branches, to the local businesses and governmental entities. While attending the Louisiana Library Association's annual conference, and she identified a number of ways her library system could benefit from data mapping, including site selection, advocacy, and strategic planning.

One of the first projects Stein explored through data mapping was a comparison of two locations the library was considering for a new branch. Visualizing a 1-mile, 3-mile, and 5-mile radius around each location, she accessed online demographic maps to compare who was living in each location and what other community resources were available in the area.

"Finding a site for a new branch is politically sensitive," she explained. "You can't just say, 'That'll be a good place!' You have to prove that the residents match up with the library's customer base."

» **“We want to maximize successful outcomes for our community, and yet we know we only have limited resources,” says McCullough. Mapping helped the group begin to visualize current efforts across the city and to place these activities within a larger demographic context. “This is exactly the kind of information we need to help guide our decision making.”**

Stein shared the location insight she acquired through the maps with Library Director Spencer Watts, who passed it on to the Library Board and a site search firm that was helping them through the process. As a result, the Library Board was able to clarify their ideas about population demographics and refine their site selection parameters for the new branch.

The library also used mapping to advocate for funding. In preparing for the 2015 election that will include a vote on millage rates, Stein again relied on online maps to illustrate demographic changes in East Baton Rouge over the past decade. In particular, she highlighted the population boom post-Hurricane Katrina, when nearly a quarter of a million people descended on the city overnight, many of them staying on as permanent residents.

Through the mapping data, Stein was able to document growth points and points of change, “input measures” that are essential to communicating the library’s value to the community (along with “output measures,” such as circulation). While the election will take place next October, the library is actively lobbying now with the Metro Council, government officials, and stakeholders to set the millage rate.

EBRPL has also used data mapping to help increase the relevancy of the library’s reference services and to broaden its outreach to the community. One of the first reference requests came from the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC), which needed a variety of economic and workforce data. The library reference staff was able to locate and export the data as maps and reports to provide visual information for the BRAC.

Stein plans to reach out to the city council, the planning office, the mayor’s staff, the redevelopment association, several local and state non-profit groups, and grant writers to let them know how the library can help

them provide reliable insight for their work. The reference staff is even beginning to populate the library’s own interactive Community Information Database/Asset Map with relevant data.

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) has been serving the suburban community surrounding the city of Baltimore since 1948. Based in Towson, Maryland, this nationally recognized library system has nineteen branches, almost one-half-million registered users, and more than ten million loans per year.

Emily Gamertsfelder, BCPL’s planning, projects and data coordinator, uses data mapping software to input patron data and assess a variety of indicators in relation to that data. According to Gamertsfelder, BCPL is using the data to redefine their services and analyze the community demographics of each branch. BCPL generates reports based on newly defined services and compares those to radius reports two or more miles around the branch library locations. The reports illustrate vast differences between the new services and the existing radii around the branches.

This information has also been used by the 70-plus staff members who are working to determine priorities for BCPL’s FY16-18 Strategic Plan. To further help with this project, BCPL staff created maps based on who is using the library, finding that patrons may be visiting branches outside of their neighborhood. They are then using the software to help determine which services—e-government or passport services as well as literacy programs—are needed at the various branches.

For example, workforce and employment data indicators helped BCPL identify areas that might need mobile career centers with laptops to help residents find jobs. Also, the

population of Baltimore County is aging: 14 percent to 16 percent of the residents are age 65 or older. Through mapping, BCPL can visualize areas with concentrated numbers of senior citizens and tailor services relevant to this age group.

CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF PITTSBURGH: OFFICE OF PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh’s (CLP) mission is to engage its community in literacy and learning. Established in 1895 by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie as a public trust to be funded by the community, the library derives approximately 90 percent of its annual operating budget from public or government sources, including the Allegheny County Regional Asset District, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the City of Pittsburgh. With more than 2 million visitors and 3.9 million items borrowed each year, CLP is one of the largest public libraries in Pennsylvania.

CLP contributes to the educational attainment, economic development and cultural enrichment of the region. Through critical services—such as early learning programs for children, job search assistance, and computer and Internet access—the library fosters lifelong learning. Assistant Director Holly McCullough heads CLP’s Programs and Partnerships Office. McCullough and the program and service coordinators she works with were interested in using data tools to target and strategically prioritize the library’s efforts.

“We want to maximize successful outcomes for our community, and yet we know we only have limited resources,” says McCullough. Mapping helped the group begin to visualize current efforts across the city and to place these activities within a larger demographic context. “This is exactly the kind of information we need to help guide our decision making,” she adds.

» “Librarians know their communities, but it’s powerful to be able to confirm our experiences,” says Kinney. Once she set up custom regions, Kinney has been able to run reports. “I can export age ranges from our ILS and easily see the number of children registered with the library in any part of the county,” she explains.

McCullough has also found the tool to be beneficial when accessing needed data during communications with stakeholders. “We work with a number of funders who are focused on particular neighborhoods and regions,” she explains. “Being able to respond to questions about needs and demographics in any particular area communicates that the library is a valuable community asset and partner.”

As a Fellow in Public Affairs for Coro Pittsburgh, an organization with a mission to advance ethical and effective leaders who share a commitment to civic engagement, Flavia Bleahu served a rotation supporting CLP’s planning efforts. She created custom regions for each library service and uploaded data on their outreach and in-reach programs. She also mapped K-5 and early learning programs to visualize against criteria such as families in poverty and changes in the areas over time.

Through pinpointing an area of interest by layering different conditions, Bleahu was able to explore beyond the original scope of her deliverables and offer recommendations for new sites of outreach to Pittsburgh communities.

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Prince George’s County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS), just outside of Washington, DC, in suburban Maryland, provides materials and information for study and personal enrichment to its patrons. The librarian staff offers strategies for lifelong learning through access to varied media and professional guidance. These services include a range of programs, from literacy education for toddlers to outreach functions for seniors.

Anita Kinney, data analyst, uses online mapping for analysis and planning purposes. By uploading library-specific program and patron data, she is able to create custom service area boundaries for reporting purposes. Comparing the geographic boundaries of each library branch with school boundaries allows librarians to do more effective community outreach.

Recently, librarians also included Prince George’s County local council districts in a special project the library is completing in preparation for an annual meeting about the library’s budget. PGCMLS was able to identify the number of library customers in each representative’s district.

“Librarians know their communities,

but it’s powerful to be able to confirm our experiences,” says Kinney. Once she set up custom regions, Kinney has been able to run reports. “I can export age ranges from our ILS and easily see the number of children registered with the library in any part of the county,” she explains. Library managers receive a custom demographic report for the areas served by each of their branches, which helps them calculate market penetration of their library’s services.

A MANAGEMENT TOOL

Libraries of all types are finding ways to not only provide data mapping software to patrons but also to use that software to further their own strategic planning and outreach services. By exploring the possibilities, librarians can hone in on comparative data that enhances their own decision making and allows them to become trusted resources for their community partners. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Trudie Thomas is PolicyMap’s vice president for business development. She can be reached by phone at 215-574-5923 or by email at Trudie.Thomas@policymap.com.



Preservation Imaging Services

Digital Imaging
Microfilming

Content Management
Hosting

800-236-0850 www.normicro.com sales@nmt.com