

# **When the Evidence Isn't Enough: Organizational Factors That Influence Effective and Sustainable Library Assessment**

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EBLIP4

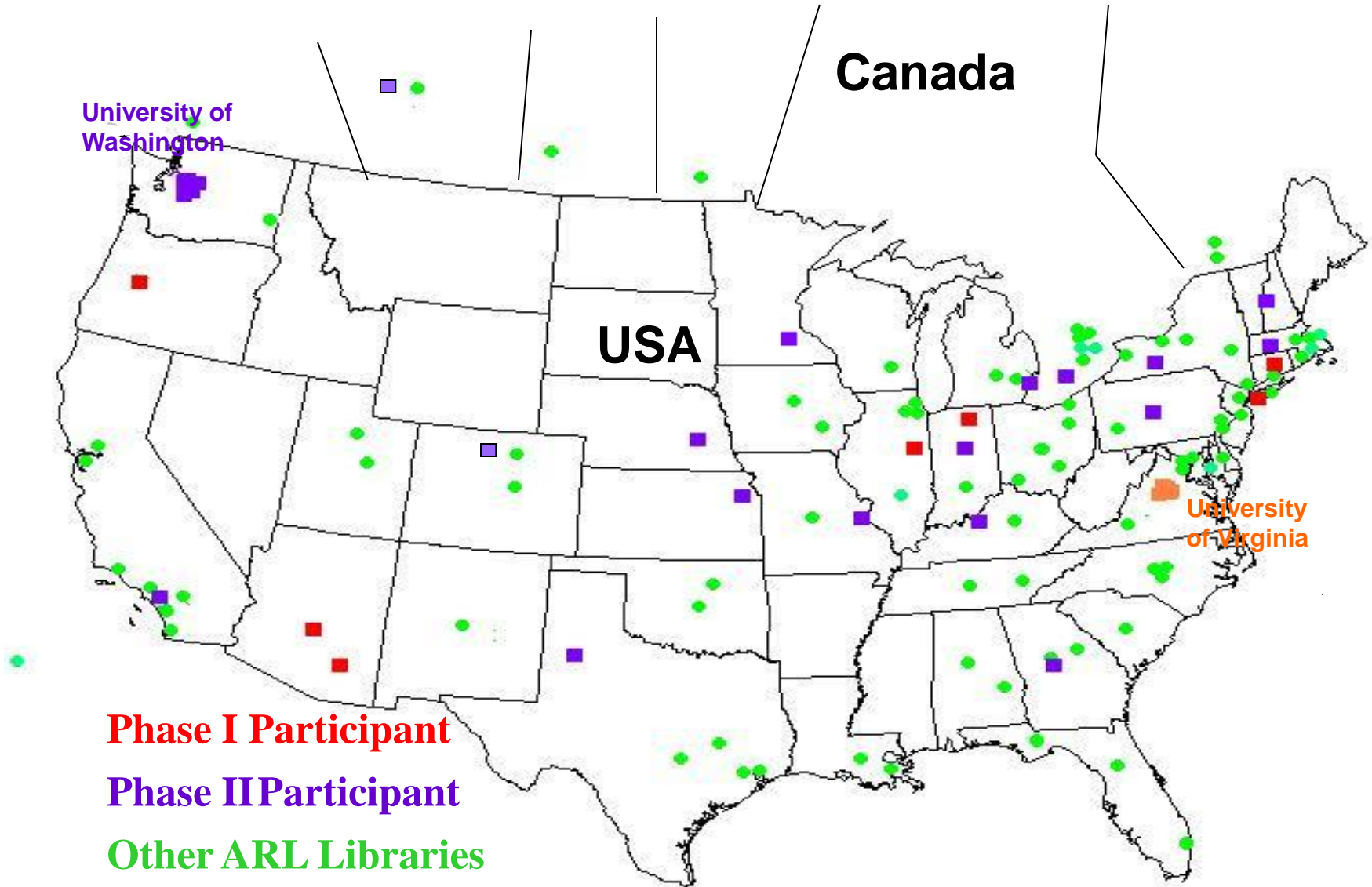
Durham, North Carolina

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# **Making Library Assessment Work: Practical Approaches for Developing and Sustaining Effective Assessment (2005-2006)**

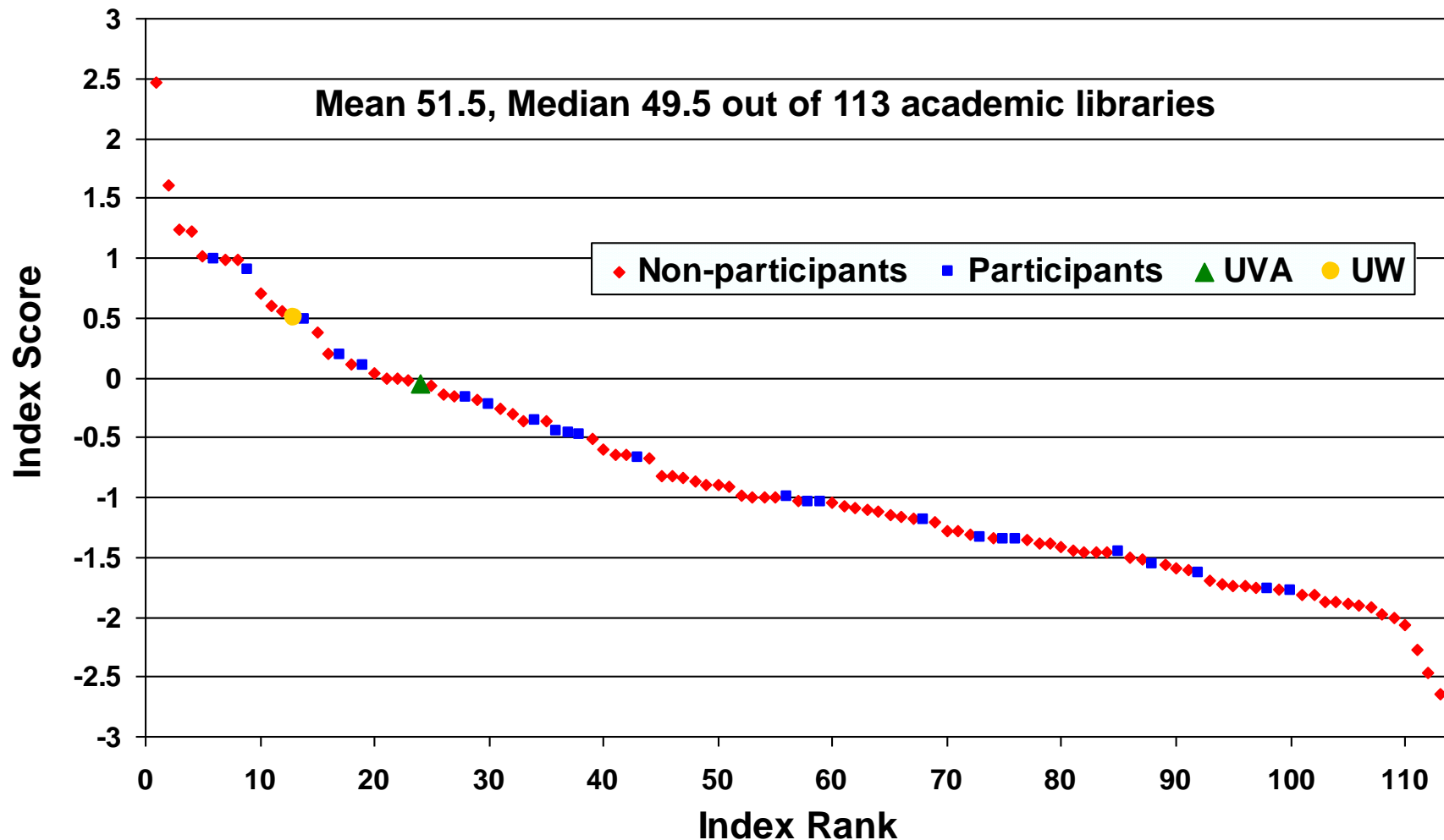
- Association of Research Libraries Project
  - “Assess the state of assessment efforts in individual research libraries, identify barriers and facilitators of assessment, and devise pragmatic approaches to assessment that can flourish in different local environments”
- Funded by 24 participating ARL libraries
- All 24 visited between February 2005 and December 2006 by Jim Self and Steve Hiller
- Written report for each library with recommendations for moving assessment forward

# Geographic Distribution of Participating Libraries



# Participant Distribution by 2004 ARL Index

## Ranking (Volumes held, volumes added, current serials, total expenditures, total staff)



# Library Assessment

Library assessment provides a structured process to learn about our communities, their work and the libraries connection to what they do

The information acquired through library assessment is used in an iterative manner to improve library programs and services and make our libraries responsive to the needs of our communities.

Most libraries are part of larger organizations. Assessment within the organization may take place in individual areas as well as at the broad institutional level.

# Assessment Process

- Focuses on customer needs, defining measurable “outputs” and offering services that meet those needs
- Collects, analyzes and uses data for management, program development, and decision-making
- Emphasizes ongoing communication with customers, opportunities for collaboration, qualitative measures and circular process of continuous improvement

# Catalysts for Assessment of Academic Libraries

- Accreditation (institutional and programmatic)
- University focus on learning outcomes
- Data driven university administrations
- Facilities renovation
- Using LibQUAL+™ results
- Usability
- Desire to improve services and demonstrate value
- Desire to ‘tell our own story’
- Evaluation required as part of grant-funded project

# **Making Library Assessment Work: Data Collection Methods**

## **Pre-Visit**

- Survey on assessment activities, needs etc.
- Telephone follow-up
- Mining library and institutional web pages

## **Visit (1.5 days)**

- Presentation on effective assessment
- Group meetings

## **Follow-up and report**

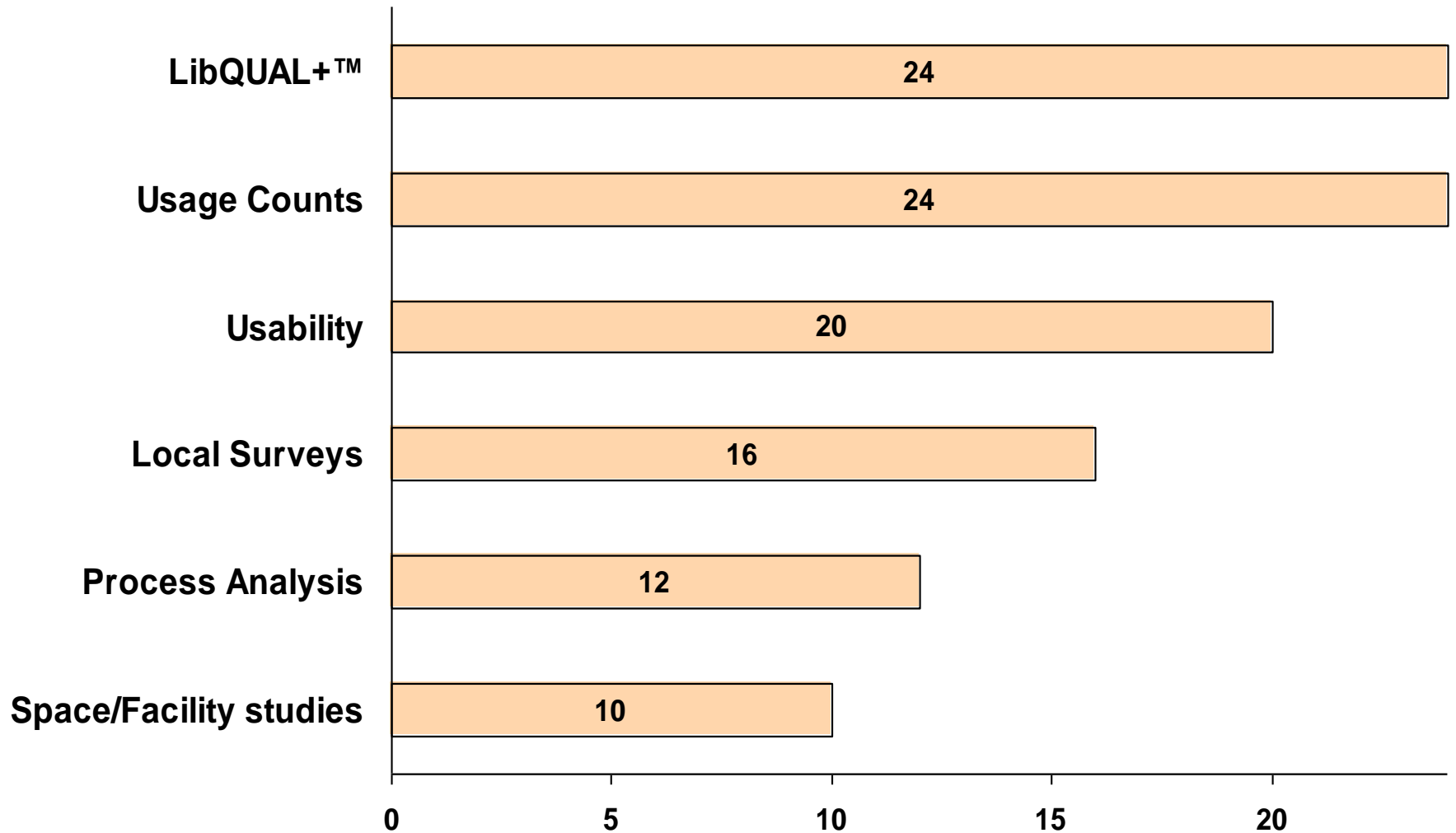
- Pursue leads and additional information

# Pre-Visit Survey

- Summary of recent assessment activity
- Important motivators/catalysts
- Organizational structure for assessment
- What has worked well
- Problems or sticking points
- Specific areas to address
- Expectations for this effort
- Inventory of statistics (separate survey)

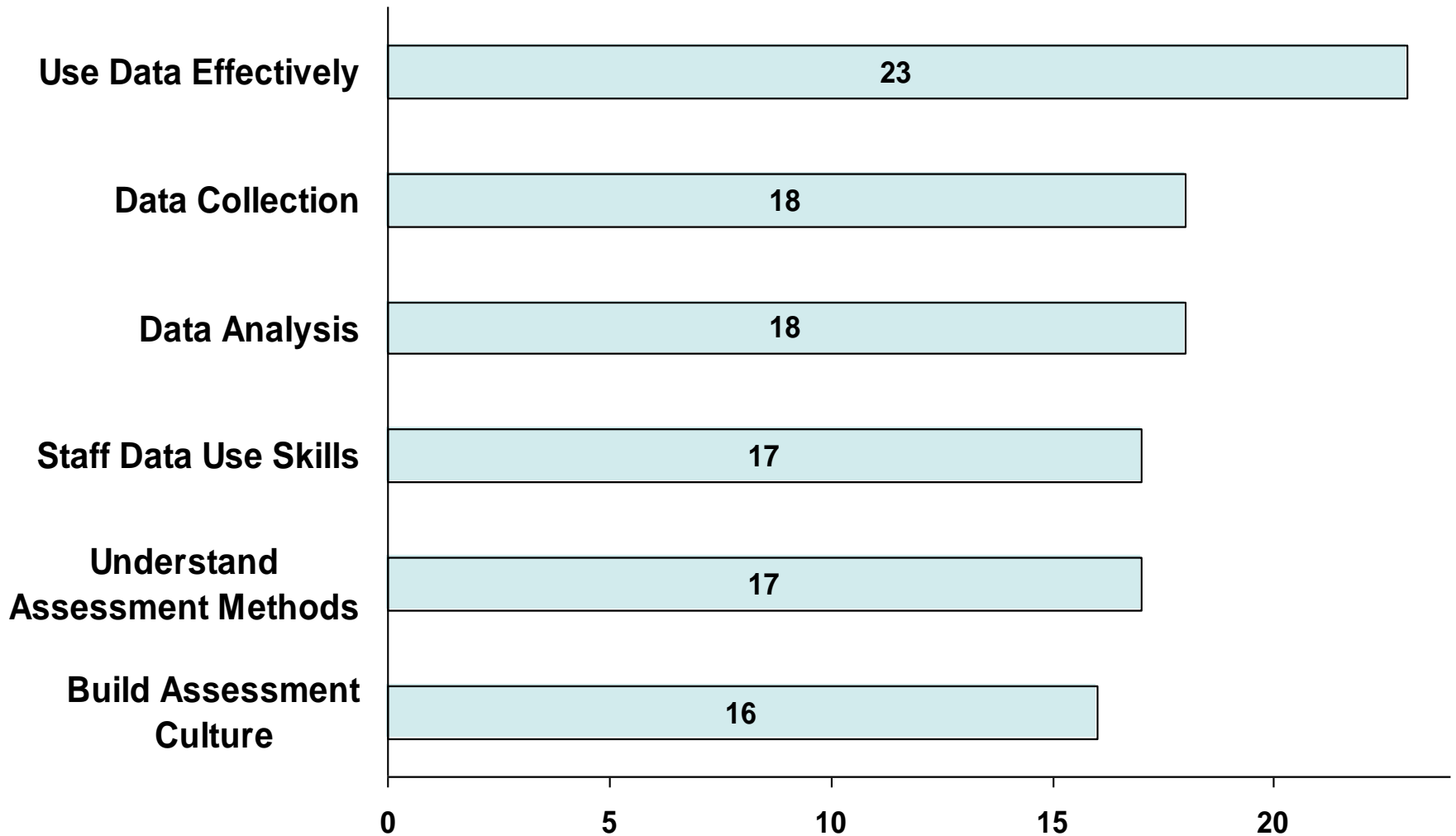
# Commonly Used Assessment Methods

(24 Libraries)

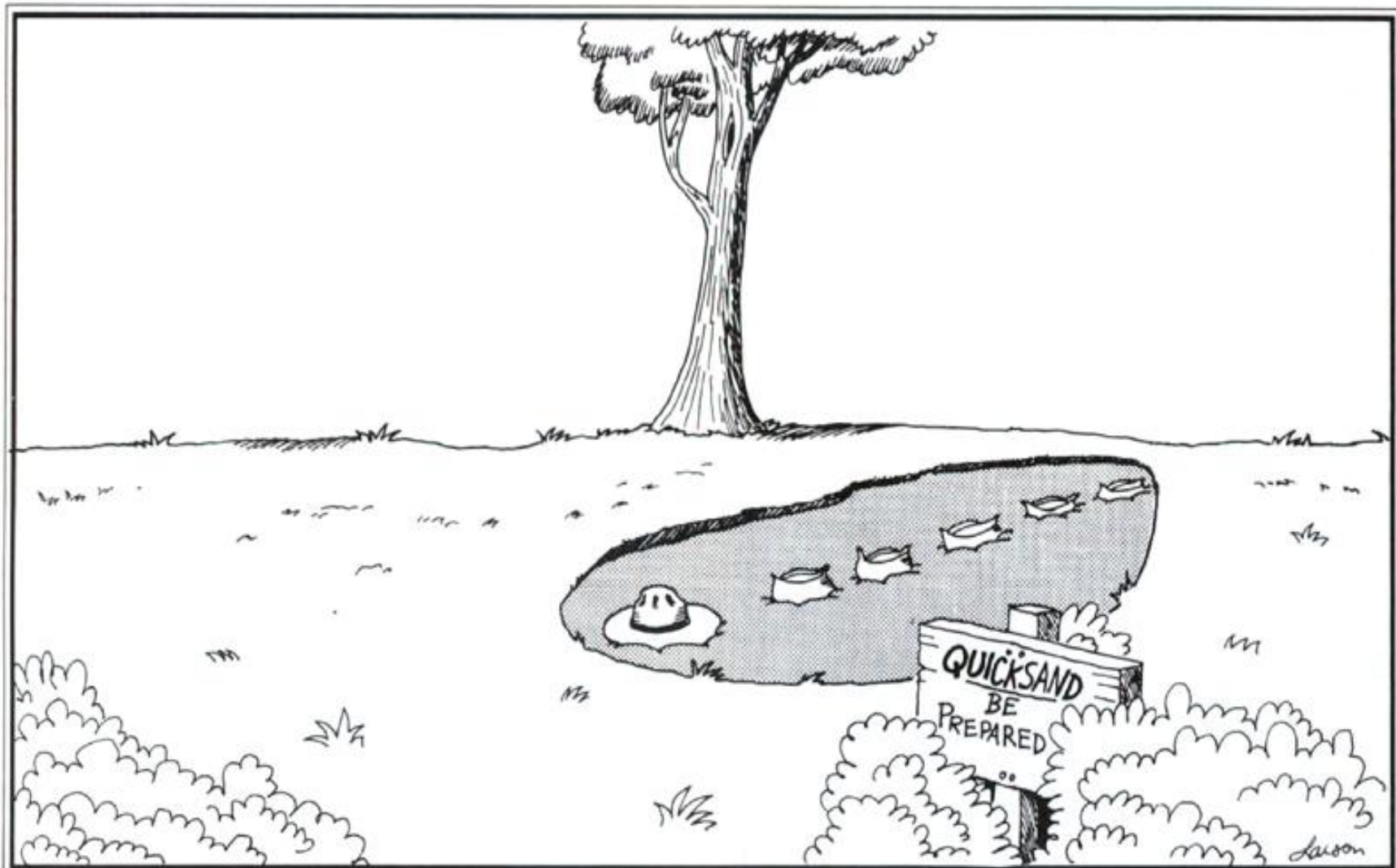


# Commonly Identified Assessment Needs

(24 Libraries)



# When the Evidence Isn't Used



# Using Data in Decision Making

(From Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006)

## What makes it hard to be evidence-based?

- There's too much evidence
- There's not enough good evidence
- The evidence doesn't quite apply
- People are trying to mislead you
- You are trying to mislead you
- The side effects outweigh the cure
- Stories are more persuasive anyways

# Skeptical Homer



“ Oh, people can come up with statistics to prove anything Kent [Brockman]. 14% of people know that.”

“Facts are meaningless. You could use facts to prove anything that's even remotely true!”

**Homer Simpson**

# **Some Reasons Why Libraries Aren't Evidence-Based**

- **Don't know what evidence to collect**
  - Few libraries understand or are skilled in basic research methods
- **Don't understand the evidence**
  - Few library staff have experience in data analysis
- **Don't know how to present the evidence**
  - Difficulty in identifying what is important and actionable
- **Trouble using the evidence for positive change**
  - All of the above and organizational structure/culture
- **Lack a solid evidence base in the profession**

# Organizational Factors That Impede Effective and Sustainable Assessment

- Lack of an “institutional” research infrastructure
- Emphasis is on management and service responsibilities not research
- No assessment advocate within organization
- Poor coordination or awareness of internal efforts
- Library staff lack research methodology skills
- Library “culture” is skeptical of data
- Librarians have multiple time-consuming responsibilities
- Leadership does not view as priority
- Library organizational structure is often “silo-based”

# Organizational Indicators of Effective Assessment

- Library leadership/management want to use data
- Customer focus is a shared library value
- Organizational culture receptive to change and improvement
- Assessment responsibility recognized and supported
- Library has a process for strategic planning/priorities
- Evidence/Data used to improve services/programs
  - Web sites (usability)
  - Facilities (qualitative methods)
  - Serial subscriptions (emetrics)
  - LibQUAL+™ results are followed-up

# Evidence of Effective and Sustainable Assessment

- Formal assessment program established
- Institutional research agenda tied to strategic priorities and goals is defined and operating
- Training in research methodology and assessment techniques supported; involve other knowledgeable campus partners
- Research balanced with needs for timely decision-making
- Assessment results presented, understood and acted upon
- Results reported back to the customer community
- Library can demonstrate value provided to community