

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

New York City College of Technology

2014

threeSOURCE: Reimagining How We Collect and Share Information about Social Issues

Jen Hoyer

CUNY New York City College of Technology

Stephen MacDonald

Edmonton Social Planning Council

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ny_pubs/807

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

threeSOURCE: Reimagining How We Collect and Share Information about Social Issues

Jen Hoyer and Stephen MacDonald

Introduction

This chapter examines management of information about social justice issues through a discussion of the development and implementation of threeSOURCE (www.threesource.ca). Managed by the Resource Coordinator (RC) at the Edmonton Social Planning Council, threeSOURCE is an online research database and library catalog that was created to help community organizations in the Canadian province of Alberta retrieve information about local social issues that they work to address.

The authors of this paper have been involved with threeSOURCE from its inception to the present. Jen Hoyer worked as RC at the Edmonton Social Planning Council from 2009 to 2011, launching threeSOURCE in October 2010. When Jen took off for the African bush in 2011, Stephen MacDonald took over the RC position and has worked to promote threeSOURCE, expanding the size and diversity of threeSOURCE's user base.

Our reflections on the creation, design, and implementation of threeSOURCE highlight exciting new ways to think about information delivery. As librarians working in a position that was not advertised exclusively to information professionals, we reflect on how our profession should look for new places for our skills to be used. Finally, we discuss how the work we do can reflect and challenge the core values of our profession.

A Library for Social Issues

While librarians and the many types of libraries they work in often care deeply about social justice issues, those working in the social services sector as researchers or practitioners tend not to maximize library resources relevant to their work. Reasons for this are beyond the scope of this chapter, but they include factors such as a limited amount of time to conduct research, accessibility to research that impacts their sector, and the relevance of collections that are available to them (Krekoski, 2008).

As a social justice research agency with over seventy years' history providing information about social issues in the community, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) finds itself in a unique position to capture and provide access to resources about social issues in the province that are relevant to researchers, students, practitioners, and the general public. The ESPC has for decades maintained its library as a means of providing space for important resources that might not find a home in other library collections.

Much of the literature produced by social justice organizations is classified as grey literature. Grey literature refers to documents in any format and in any sector that are produced outside the realm of commercial publishing (Grey Literature Network Service, 2012). In the social services sector, this includes but is not limited to policy documents, operational plans, and program reviews. In traditional libraries, grey literature often falls through the cracks. It can be difficult to shelve, classify, and provide access to these types of publications. At the Edmonton Social Planning Council, in an environment dedicated to the use of such information, these documents were a natural fit. Over the history of the ESPC, countless stories have been told of policy makers and agency directors searching tirelessly for an important document—even one that their own organization had authored—and discovering that the only publicly available copy of the publication was sitting on a shelf of the library at the ESPC Resource Library. The significance of this small resource library collection cannot be understated: it has served as a unique and important repository of research publications on local social issues that support the work of Edmonton's social services sector.

Context Matters: Social Issues in the City of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta

Located in the central area of the province of Alberta, Edmonton is a growing, medium-sized city of 817,498 people (City of Edmonton, 2012). The city is located near Alberta's large oil sand reserves. The oil industry in Alberta is a

major employer, creating spin-off jobs in the Edmonton area that fuel the city economy. In recent years, the city has attracted people from across Canada and from other countries in search of employment. Because of the city's strong economic standing, it has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. With that said, Edmonton is not immune from major social problems, including poverty, homelessness, and related issues:

- In 2010, there were over 91,000 children under the age of 18 living below the low income measure (Statistics Canada, 2012).
- Research has also found that there is a significant number of low-income employees working in the city. According to Statistics Canada data purchased by Public Interest Alberta, 418,900 workers in the province of Alberta (or 23.8% of the workforce) are making below \$15 an hour. Most of these workers (77%) are at least 20 years old and are in the prime wage earning years. Research has also shown that more women than men are employed in low-wage positions in Alberta. Of all low-wage workers in Alberta, 60.8% (or 254,700) of these individuals are women (Public Interest Alberta, 2012).
- Similar trends are occurring in Edmonton. 139,900 workers in Edmonton are making below \$15 an hour. Almost a quarter of these individuals (23.9%) are over 20 years of age. As in the province as a whole, more women than men are employed in low-wage positions. In Edmonton, 61.1% of low wage workers are women (Public Interest Alberta, 2012).
- Homelessness is a continuing problem in the province. According to the 2010 Edmonton Homeless Count, 2421 homeless individuals were counted in Edmonton. A significant percentage of these individuals (36%) appeared to be Aboriginal (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2012). The number of homeless individuals seems to have dropped between 2008 and 2010, when volunteers counted 3079 homeless Edmontonians (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2012). In Calgary, the January 2012 homeless count found 3190 homeless individuals in the city (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2012).

This brief discussion about poverty and homelessness shows that Edmonton is dealing with related social issues as well, such as systemic racism and gender inequality. Fortunately, Edmonton has a swath of social service agencies that exist to fight social inequality and help vulnerable groups of people live a better life. threeSOURCE was designed to keep the social services sector informed about statistical trends related to social issues and new research that can help these organizations develop solutions to the problems they are addressing in the community.

Improving Access: Finding a Way Forward

Aware of the value of its library collection, and equally aware of the fact that a room full of books and reports in the offices of a small social justice think tank is not the first stop for researchers and policy makers in their search for the information they need, the ESPC decided to improve access and increase use of its resource collection. In 2009, funds were sought from a grant under the Government of Alberta's Community Initiatives Program to take the library online.

With a little software and some computer know-how, setting up a Web-based library system is a fairly easy venture. Doing a good job of it, however, can be tricky business. The unique nature of the ESPC's resource collection, combined with the distinctive information behavior of its targeted user community within the field of social justice researchers and practitioners, called for a thoughtful approach to the system design and implementation of this proposed digital library. The body of literature about the information behavior of practitioners and researchers in the fields of social policy and social justice is, to be generous, quite limited. A lengthy attempt at a literature review turned up nothing that could directly inform the development of a system for this specific context.

Meet the User

In 2008, the ESPC created the position of Resource Coordinator (RC), whose main role would be to spearhead library-related projects in the organization. A social science practitioner was hired to take on this position and was made responsible for reviving the oft-neglected physical library and bringing the library online. The first major project was to conduct a series of community consultations with organizations in the community that would benefit from resources in the library. "Community partners" were identified as organizations working in the community to achieve a more socially and economically just Edmonton (Krekoski, 2008).

Leaders of these organizations—which included social service agencies, think tanks, and activist groups—sat around the table to discuss the types of research information they need and the information that is necessary to carry out their role in the community. The diverse community leaders identified a wide range of pressing social issues that their respective organizations needed current information about. Poverty was referenced as a central theme that other issues stemmed from; other major concerns related to the actions of elected officials regarding social issues, the support systems in place for social issues, and

the impact of the economic climate on social conditions. Participants discussed the types of research or policy publications that would be useful to their work in relation to these issues (Krekoski, 2008).

Participants also identified the following six reasons why they need access to current research and policy publications in their field: advocating for the issues that their organization addresses, demonstrating the role that their organization plays, building capacity within their sector, facilitating collaboration, undertaking education and awareness initiatives, and informing service delivery by their organization to the community.

This community consultation process had two immediate results. It sparked new research projects by the ESPC that would address social issues highlighted by participants. With regard to the library, it helped the ESPC investigate more deeply the ways it could provide community partners with better access to current information and research.

Designing the Right System: Asking the Right Questions

Understanding the information behavior of a library's projected users is the first crucial step towards finding the best solution for user needs. The community consultations described above provided basic information on what type of information the ESPC library's user community is looking for and how they intend to use it. At the same time, these discussions raised further questions about the information-seeking behavior of these community organizations. While agency executive directors might want more information on homelessness statistics and program implementation, where would they go to find this information if it existed? How would they prefer to access it? If policy makers are desperate to find documents from other jurisdictions, what is their first port of call? Is an online library system the best answer for their information needs?

In 2009, when the original RC left the position to follow new opportunities, the RC job advertisement for a social science graduate who could assist with research in a social justice think tank and also set up an online database of research materials caught the eye of an information professional. Fresh out of an MLIS degree program, and with a background working in public and school libraries, Jen Hoyer explained to the ESPC hiring committee that they didn't need an expert in the field, they needed an expert on information. With a librarian now at the helm, and as applications for funding to build an online library system were being submitted, the focus of community consultations switched to user behavior. A series of phone calls and face-to-face conversations broached new topics: *"What kind of information do you need to do your work? When you try*

to stay up-to-date in your field, who do you talk to first? If we have a great collection of resources on the shelf at our office, would you come look at them? Where do you go online to find the information you need?"

Their answers to these questions were unanimous: Practitioners need the latest (and possibly most difficult to find) reports published by small think tanks scattered across the country. They want research that is relevant to their specialized field of work as soon it is published. Current information is shared by talking with colleagues. Going to a room full of books and reports doesn't fit in the schedule of a busy researcher, program planner, or executive director. An unfamiliar online tool would take time to learn. Many of these individuals do not have enough time to muddle through complex search interfaces. Although Google might not be the best research tool available, it usually helps them find the information they need to answer their research questions.

Evaluating the Real Need

Creating a relevant and effective online library tool for this audience became daunting: in a classic case of "the consumers do not actually know what they want," the projected user group did not want an online library—they were happy enough with Google. They didn't have time to search for new resources; they just wanted to have immediate access to this information so they could talk about it with their colleagues as soon as possible. Designing a system to meet the information needs of the social services sector would require thinking outside the box—or, outside the Web portal.

In light of this, we outlined what the user community needed, how this fit with subject scope and document formats in the resource collection, and how information behavior could fit with information delivery models.

What do our users want? Social service practitioners, researchers, and policy makers want current and timely information that is precisely relevant to their field of work or study. Collection development should rely on constantly monitoring collection use, attentively following appropriate authors and publishers, and delivering new information as soon as possible.

How do our users want it? They want to have a conversation. Users want to sit around their offices and ask colleagues what the newest and most relevant publications are for their area of work. Important new information needs to be on the front of everyone's mind as they chat around the water cooler.

Will they join the conversation? Similar online information portals, designed to feed off the social networking buzz and requiring user involvement to function well, have struggled to find an active user base. Abra Brynne of bitsandbytes.ca described their challenge to involve users; after designing an online portal that relied on members to post the latest research publications, the system lagged in currency when busy community members could not find time to post (A. Brynne, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Users want to feel that they are involved in a social information exchange, but the system must not depend entirely on user participation.

How can we make it work? The managers of similar online portals at the Resource Centre for Voluntary Organizations (now the Volunteer Alberta Resource Centre) and Imagine Canada (L. Baker, personal communication, May 27, 2010; M. Kwasnicki, personal communication, June 2010) advised that a successful information system should be managed by information professionals who understand information, technology, and information behavior—someone who can ask the right questions about user behavior and implement feedback into design. Looking at current social networking and communication trends, they echoed Brynne's reflections on user dependence and concluded that a successful system must invite conversation but not rely on user participation.

The Best Fit For Your Needs: Meet threeSOURCE

threeSOURCE was launched in October 2010 at www.threesource.ca; to create its title, we combined “resource” with the “three” of “third sector”—a term applied to nonprofit and social service organizations (following the “first sector” of government and the “second sector” of business).

As an information system, threeSOURCE is a hybrid between a library catalog and a bibliographic database. While some of the records in threeSOURCE are for traditional monographs on the shelves of the ESPC's physical library, a large proportion of the records describe print or electronic articles, conference proceedings, and other grey literature that is highly relevant to the user audience. Many of these records in threeSOURCE offer direct access to electronic full-text versions of these reports. A URL to the report on the publisher's website or a link to the file on our own server is available in the report's threeSOURCE record. As of this writing, the database contains 1411 records that either provide access to a PDF version of a report or a link to a report on the publishing organization's website. These records account for over 30% of all records in threeSOURCE. The electronic reports are being accessed far more often than books and other print resources in our physical library.

Because threeSOURCE was created with the existing shelf-bound ESPC Resource Library as its foundation, the preliminary collection was, with few exceptions, print-only. By contrast, current additions to threeSOURCE are almost entirely full-text electronic, apart from a few print-only monographs. Additionally, major efforts have been made to add full-text electronic editions to records previously created for print-only items. threeSOURCE was launched in October 2010 with approximately 3000 print-only items; two years later, with that print-only foundation still intact but with a heavy acquisition emphasis on electronic full-text, the portion of full-text items in threeSOURCE has risen to one third.

Underlying many initial design decisions, the structure of threeSOURCE was kept very basic in an attempt to move away from the complexity of library tools and towards the simplicity of the most-used Web search platforms. For a busy user community that loves Google, the front end of threeSOURCE provides a simple search box. Users should be able to find what they need by typing a few words into a single space. If the user is interested in running a more sophisticated, but not overly complex, search query to find the information they need, they can use threeSOURCE's advanced search interface. This allows users to search for reports with a particular title, subject focus, and publication date. Since it only has four fields and contains a detailed instruction guide, the search engine is a user-friendly tool that allows people to make the most of their experience using this database.

Innovation: Information Management in the Context of the Social Services Sector

The success of threeSOURCE as a tool that is relevant to users in the social services sector has depended on innovative librarians who can think outside the library. Creative solutions have been required from the early planning stages through the current implementation and promotion; if designed as a standard library tool, threeSOURCE would be less useful and less relevant to its target audience than it is now. A few pertinent examples highlight how threeSOURCE stands as a model for new ways of thinking about information management.

The Embedded Librarian: Being Aware of User Needs and Their Information-Seeking Behavior

The RC position at the ESPC is a unique type of information worker, a prime example of an “embedded librarian”—an information professional who

is a part of the community that they serve. This position allows the information professional to understand the context they are operating within and deliver appropriate services that satisfy the unique information needs of the individuals and organizations they work with.

threeSOURCE is more than a website and more than an online library catalog—it is our new way of starting conversations with our community. The RC interacts with the database's user groups in physical (conferences and symposiums, social gatherings of sector professionals, business meetings involving the sector) and online (social media applications, ESPC website) spaces. Interviews with intended users revealed that members of this sector usually begin their search for information by asking their colleagues. Taking that into consideration, threeSOURCE has tried to become one of these colleagues. This means networking with users at community events and sector-specific functions. During these interactions, we learn more about user groups' information needs and demonstrate how threeSOURCE can connect them with research that they are looking for.

The RC represents the ESPC at meetings, conferences, community lectures, and social events that bring together individuals who work in Edmonton's social services sector. While attending these events, we encourage sector practitioners to use threeSOURCE to stay informed about new research on social issues affecting the community. In addition to talking about threeSOURCE with employees in this sector, the RC has the opportunity to set up displays at relevant conferences in Edmonton. These displays have included bookmarks that contain additional information about threeSOURCE; a laptop to show delegates the database's search functions and its research potential; and a paper form delegates could fill out to subscribe to threeSOURCE's acquisitions email list, which notifies subscribers about new publications added to the database.

Relationships with the user community have helped develop the collection hosted by threeSOURCE. We continually encourage nonprofit organizations in the Edmonton area to submit research reports that they produce. These organizations have become aware of the value of having a stable repository for their publications in a world where Web hosts cannot always be maintained by small organizations, and they are eager to see their publications shared more widely than their own publishing capacity would allow.

Knowledge Is Everything: Determining Information Authority

Information literacy in the social services sector relies on having an awareness of the sector in order to determine source authority. The minds behind

threeSOURCE are involved in the community that is writing and publishing research materials for the third sector, and we are able to use this knowledge to select credible resources that can be added to the database.

Traditional information literacy principles surrounding source authority—credibility of author and publisher—are difficult to assess in a sector where much of the most pertinent information is published as grey literature. A research paper that appeared only on the website of a small institute may not look authoritative but may be the best source on its topic; conversely, a shiny PDF full of pristine charts and tables could seem to be a highly believable source but might be published by an organization known for presenting one-sided arguments based on incomplete research. In the social services sector, determining source authority comes not through traditional processes of looking at the type of publication or its origin but through interaction with the community of authors and publishers, and knowledge of which authors and publishers are producing the most relevant and reliable information (Hoyer, 2011).

The RC is employed by a research and advocacy organization that works with similar organizations in Alberta and other parts of Canada on projects related to social issues. As a result, we can draw upon our own and our coworkers' existing knowledge of authoritative social research institutions to select reliable publications for threeSOURCE. Moreover, we use our analytical skills to ensure that the reports that we add to this database are high-quality publications. We do this by reviewing them to ensure that they are well-researched, cite dependable sources of information, and are written by credible authors and researchers in their field.

Of course, our own values and those of the organization we have been working for shape our understanding of what a reliable source is. As a result, some reports that other researchers consider to be reliable may not meet our standards. As well, we may feel comfortable including some, but not all, of the reports that an organization publishes, even if all of their publications focus on subject areas that threeSOURCE covers. For example, we have chosen not to include reports on poverty written by a well-known think-tank in Alberta because we do not agree with their method of measuring poverty, which shapes their research on this issue. At the same time, we have added to threeSOURCE reports published by this organization that focus on other subjects that fall within our library's collection mandate.

While users may not have the experience or time to properly make these judgments regarding source authority, we can pass on our own expertise to threeSOURCE users by carefully selecting authoritative documents and declining potential acquisitions that don't make the cut.

Joining the Conversation

Realizing how much our users like to talk about information, we set up threeSOURCE as a means to create conversation. We start discussion around the break room with a series of lunchtime talks that profile important issues and organizations in the local third sector. The ESPC's highly successful Lunch and Learn Series is an opportunity for users to talk about what information they need and what information has helped them tackle the issues profiled at each of these events. Also, these lunches are an opportunity for the RC to share new publications and talk to social service workers about their information needs.

We begin electronic conversations by sending messages to those who have subscribed to the database's acquisitions email list. Subscribers receive an email that informs them about new research publications added to the database and provides them with a direct link to threeSOURCE records. Individuals can also learn about additions to threeSOURCE by subscribing to the database's acquisitions RSS feed, which is updated after a report is cataloged. Also, the ESPC's monthly email newsletter, *Research Update*, contains links to new and especially relevant publications, plus reviews of valuable and current research reports that have been recently added to threeSOURCE. Written by volunteers from various backgrounds, these reviews kick-start further discussions on timely publications. Below each review's abstract in the newsletter are links to threeSOURCE search queries that are related to the subject area of the particular review.

These days, social media is an ever-present tool for our conversation with current and potential threeSOURCE user groups. The RC uses the ESPC's social media applications to demonstrate how threeSOURCE is a valuable tool for retrieving publications on particular social issues in Alberta. During days, weeks, and months that recognize a particular social issue (International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Housing Month, etc.), messages and tweets containing URIs to resources that focus on these issues are posted to the ESPC Facebook and Twitter pages.

Within the community of information professionals, we have started a dialogue about new types of information tools and information sources. A presentation at the Progressive Librarians Guild of Edmonton's 2012 Symposium brought threeSOURCE to the minds of forty progressive-minded information practitioners from the area, inviting our fellow librarians to realize the potential of non-traditional systems for information management. Although we do not have any proof that this poster presentation has increased discussion about threeSOURCE in the library community in Alberta, a link to threeSOURCE was added to a university library research guide by a symposium delegate once the conference concluded. Also during the symposium, Stephen MacDonald

spoke to a librarian who expressed interest in adding a link to threeSOURCE to her library's website.

User Response

According to our Google Analytics page, visitors use threeSOURCE to access research on a variety of social issues affecting Albertans. threeSOURCE visitors tend to focus their research on a few major subjects that include poverty, income and income inequality, homelessness, affordable housing, food security, and topics related to family and children in Alberta (including family violence, child welfare, and child care). Other subject areas that visitors have explored on threeSOURCE are:

- immigration
- social inclusion and exclusion
- race and racism
- social enterprise
- sexual and labor exploitation
- education
- well-being of indigenous peoples
- social determinants of health
- health care
- nonprofit organizations
- women
- employment and unemployment

Our efforts have led to a steady increase in the number of individuals using threeSOURCE: From January 1 to December 31, 2012, threeSOURCE was accessed 1637 times by 1189 visitors. Users accessed 5520 pages in the database, viewing an average of 3.19 pages per visit. In 2012, threeSOURCE received 15% more visits, 27% more visitors, and 6% more page views than it did in 2011.

Starting a New Dialogue

Further ways for cultivating conversations about information in the social services sector have been identified. To start, we have created a compilation of email lists used by poverty and homelessness reduction advocates in Alberta, social services sector employees who work in the province, librarians both in the

Edmonton area and across North America, and other individuals interested in local social issues. Information about threeSOURCE will be distributed to these lists.

According to website statistics, threeSOURCE is being accessed by people who use computer networks operated by the City of Edmonton, other municipal governments in Alberta, the Government of Alberta, and the federal government. There is great potential for threeSOURCE to become a more regularly-used research tool among municipal, provincial, and federal public servants and politicians. We plan to promote threeSOURCE to public servants who are working on relevant social initiatives in order to help them access the latest and most pertinent information.

Librarians in public, academic, and special libraries need to become more involved in the conversation about resources related to social issues in their communities. Local librarians have shown that they are interested in and supportive of this research tool. In September 2012, academic librarians from universities across the province were contacted regarding adding threeSOURCE to their online subject guides. Because of this outreach, librarians at institutions such as the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and Grant MacEwan University have decided to add threeSOURCE to research guides that they manage. The ESPC will continue to promote threeSOURCE among academic librarians and demonstrate how university and college students in Alberta can use this database to collect research about social issues in this province.

The popular press is also providing space for threeSOURCE to demonstrate its value to the community as a research tool. The database will be featured in publications such as Peace Library System's monthly newsletter and the Edmonton Community Foundation's magazine, *Legacy in Action*.

Thinking Outside the Box

For information professionals, threeSOURCE has provided an opportunity to think outside the box, to focus more on a distinctive user community and its exceptional needs and less on the traditional service delivery mechanisms of online and physical libraries. Serving the needs of users who work in the field of social justice—whether as policy makers, researchers, or practitioners—requires information professionals to ask the right questions about information needs and use, and to listen carefully to the answers.

As mentioned in the introduction, the current shape of the Resource Coordinator position at the ESPC is also the result of a librarian thinking outside the box. More specifically, the fact that the RC is an information professional at all

is because Jen Hoyer had decided to look for all jobs that required her skill set, not only jobs that explicitly advertised for her occupation.

In an increasingly information-based world, it is essential for information workers to look for new places to use their abilities, even where employers haven't realized that such a professional would be suitable for the job. Our expertise is becoming vital in a growing number of places, and it is up to us to educate the rest of society about where and how they need our skills. For a grant-funded position like the RC at the ESPC, convincing employers and funders of the value of having an information professional on staff is a continual process. In this context, the major investment that has been made into threeSOURCE and the role that the RC and threeSOURCE play as a locus for information produced by the ESPC form a strong leverage in favor of maintaining the RC position with an information worker on staff.

In the midst of worry over decreased hiring in traditional library settings, there are actually countless new opportunities waiting for information professionals who can look beyond the library job boards and convince employers that our training makes us the best fit for their positions. Associating with the status of a library institution or receiving the title of Librarian should ultimately be less important than working in an environment where we can do an excellent job of assisting in the use of information.

Reflecting on Librarianship: Back to Basics

threeSOURCE is a unique information project that works with and challenges the basic values of librarianship. The American Library Association's *Core Values of Librarianship* (2004)—including access, confidentiality/privacy, preservation, social responsibility, diversity, and intellectual freedom—provide us with a framework for reflecting on how threeSOURCE embodies and challenges the way librarians regard their work. The design and implementation of threeSOURCE, as described above, required creativity and innovation; the questions posed by our values as information professionals take us a step back in thinking about why we make the decisions that we do.

Many of the issues that arise out of managing threeSOURCE are a direct result of the fact that this collection is primarily composed of grey literature. Reflections on the specific issues that grey literature raise for the values of information professionals are included where appropriate in the following discussion.

Access

Collection Access

threeSOURCE is a freely-accessible research database. Other similar tools, including most bibliographic databases, require a subscription to read content. Free access to threeSOURCE is a major benefit for nonprofit organizations that need current research but do not have the budget for database and periodical subscriptions.

Multiple online entry points to threeSOURCE provide access from the ESPC website: the front page of the website contains a permanent link to threeSOURCE and a brief description of the database, and the ESPC website's New Resources page provides URLs to records of recent acquisitions. This has proven to be a successful way of channeling users to threeSOURCE.

Beyond this, we have tried to imagine where our potential users might be looking for information and how we could guide them to the resources in threeSOURCE. Featuring threeSOURCE on academic library subject guides, as described above, resulted in several new external access points. threeSOURCE is also accessible from the Library and Archives Canada *Canadian Information by Subject* research guide.

Item Access

As mentioned above, the threeSOURCE collection contains a combination of traditional monographs as well as print or electronic articles, conference proceedings, and other grey literature that is highly relevant to the user audience. Decisions about higher levels of indexing (by chapter, paper, or article) are made entirely to enhance access.

threeSOURCE provides electronic full-text access to as many items in the collection as possible; if available, records in threeSOURCE link to a PDF version of the report housed on threeSOURCE's server, which can be downloaded directly from the database. threeSOURCE also contains records for digital reports that are stored on other websites. In these cases, our record contains a URL to the full-text report on the website of the organization that originally published it. In terms of these electronic resources, the collection is accessible to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection.

For print-only resources, visible online as only an item record, any member of the public can visit the ESPC library and access materials. However, not all

threeSOURCE visitors live in the Edmonton area. A threeSOURCE user interested in a print-only resource who lives outside this region would be required to make special arrangements; off-site delivery of print formats is not generally possible. Also, only members of the ESPC are allowed to borrow publications from the library. Despite these limitations on access to the print materials themselves, the fact that threeSOURCE is a freely-accessible database allows any interested researcher to see what related publications exist.

Librarians are constantly challenged with interpreting rules of the profession—rules that might seem to recommend use of traditional subject classification schemes. Many libraries use standardized models that are created and updated by individuals who are unfamiliar with their library's collection. We believe that the basic tenets of librarianship should prioritize accessibility over tradition. When the answers to “does this classification scheme fit our collection” and “are our users so familiar with traditional classification schemes that they would have difficulty using new ones” are both a resounding “no,” access is clearly improved with a collection-specific scheme. Is this true for every user? It is certainly not the case in every library, but it may be for more libraries than have implemented customized classification schemes.

threeSOURCE resources are indexed using a subject classification scheme developed specifically for the collection. As language becomes outdated, subject headings are replaced with more current terms to reflect vocabulary changes. In the case of threeSOURCE, this is most obviously demonstrated over the last many decades by an evolution of the subject term “Indians” to “Indigenous Peoples.” The language of a classification scheme is always political, however. As an example, the possibility of adding a subject term to deal with publications related to bitumen extraction from oil sands would necessitate choosing between “oil sands” and “tar sands,” a word choice that is part of a highly politicized debate.

Providing access points to grey literature raises another set of issues: an item may have several more authors than traditional publications do or may not list any author; or title, author, and other basic information may be represented differently throughout the document. Grey literature requires that the information manager make intentional choices regarding how to make the collection most accessible.

Confidentiality/Privacy

The RC uses Google Analytics to track the ISP networks of people accessing threeSOURCE, as well as their location, pages that they access, and other statis-

tics related to the information-seeking behaviors of visitors to the website. Some of this information (including the ISP networks that accessed the database and location of users) is recorded in quarterly performance reports. These statistics are used to inform collection development and promotion of threeSOURCE, but confidentiality and privacy of visitors is ensured by not making this information publicly available. We track this data in order to better serve our users, while remaining conscious of the need to respect their privacy.

Preservation

By hosting full-text documents, threeSOURCE not only improves access to materials in the first place but also serves a second function as an archive. threeSOURCE operates in a sector where non-current information is often lost as organizations move offices, update computer systems, and change website hosts. This reflects a common issue when dealing with grey literature: grey literature can be less stable than traditional publications, with prime examples being electronic resources hosted on insecure servers or print documents produced on less-sturdy mediums (newsprint, for example). threeSOURCE acts as a secure repository for research publications that may be lost or poorly shared beyond their original publication and distribution.

In the digital realm, the argument that threeSOURCE adequately preserves electronic formats has limitations. All electronic versions of reports that are cataloged in threeSOURCE and stored on the ESPC's server are PDF files. Over time, these PDFs will need to be converted into newer formats. In addition, there are records in threeSOURCE that contain a URL to a full-text document hosted outside the threeSOURCE server. Websites change and disappear over time; it is possible that some of these links will become inaccessible if these external hosts go offline. Every library has a finite Web server capacity and a limited ability to host content. As a result, every librarian must make choices about the digital publications they are able to preserve.

Grey literature requires us to ask *what* we are preserving: in the case of a disintegrating newsprint pamphlet, is it necessary to find funds in a tight budget to stabilize the format, or is it only important to preserve the content of the item by scanning it and hosting the electronic version on a reliable server? threeSOURCE is designed to retain its contents in the public sphere for as long as possible. Some publications are publicly available, whether in print or digitally, only through threeSOURCE. In this situation, preserving content should take priority over preserving format.

Social Responsibility

threeSOURCE is a prime example of how information workers can use their skills to bring attention to deeply entrenched social problems that prevent certain groups in our society from reaching their full potential. By improving access to research on a variety of social issues in Alberta, threeSOURCE is part of the discussion around these issues and how they can be addressed.

The creation and maintenance of threeSOURCE also highlights a case in which someone convinced a hiring committee that the best fit for the role of RC—with the skills and background that could allow for the most socially responsible delivery of information—was a trained information professional.

Diversity

threeSOURCE strives to improve access to research publications around social problems that all Albertans face. It contains items that relate to issues involving Aboriginals, immigrants, refugees, and individuals from a variety of ethnic groups. However, the number of reports in threeSOURCE that focus on particular ethnic groups in Alberta is low in proportion to other subject areas. This may be linked to a lower publication rate on these issues, or it may be an indication that threeSOURCE must network more with diverse ethnic communities in order to discover more materials from a variety of cultural perspectives.

When conducting collection development, we have to ask ourselves if our traditional means of tracking new publications will really uncover every new item that is appropriate for the collection. In the context of grey literature, relying on publishers will be much less useful than networking with users who know what is going on in their sector and dialoguing with practitioners who produce relevant materials. Collection development that is truly diverse requires inventiveness and resourcefulness.

Intellectual Freedom

The RC adds publications to the collection based largely on an awareness of what will be useful to the user community. Because of the political leanings of current users, these publications tend to reflect a more progressive mindset. Research from conservative social policy think tanks is underrepresented in the collection. It can be argued that this contradicts our position of non-partisanship, and that the personal bias of the RC has too much influence over the selection process. However, it could also be argued that we are not intentionally selecting

material with a left-leaning position but are instead selecting items that will be used rather than disregarded, based on user feedback and database statistics.

Many of the works in threeSOURCE are written by nonprofit organizations that also identify as being non-partisan; it is possible that social policy organizations that author these publications tend to look at social issues with a more critical and progressive stance.

Considering This...

A reflection on our core values as information professionals confirms the underlying thread of our discussion about the design and implementation of threeSOURCE: building an information system cannot always rely on doing what we've been taught to do, what everyone else is doing, or even what our users say that they want us to do. Every information system will be different because every community's needs are different. By taking ourselves back to the fundamental values of our field, we can ask ourselves the big questions that properly facilitate the way we think about information delivery in any given context. Finding the right information tool for the social services sector isn't impossible, and it isn't difficult either. Applying our skills as information professionals to a community in the best way possible, and asking the deep questions that will allow us to do this, is the best way for us to fulfill our role in the community.

In Conclusion

threeSOURCE is a new way to talk about and interact with information. With exciting new methods for delivery and interaction with users—arguably the best methods for the community it intends to serve—threeSOURCE can be viewed only as a successful information system.

And yet, the key goal behind every design and implementation decision has little to do with new techniques or new technology. Innovation without purpose is meaningless. threeSOURCE is all about looking at how the social services sector retrieves and uses information, how to meet needs based on user behavior, and ultimately how to deliver the information that will help practitioners and policy makers in the sector do the best job possible of dealing with current social issues. If users want stone tablets, we have to find a way to deliver them. Thankfully our users are keen on conversation and interaction, and threeSOURCE has found a way to join the dialogue and bring new information to the table.

References

- American Library Association. (2004, June 29). Core values of librarianship. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues>
- Calgary Homeless Foundation. (2012). Preliminary report: The state of homelessness in Calgary in 2012. Retrieved from <http://calgaryhomeless.com/assets/research/The-State-of-Homelessnessonlineversion.pdf>
- City of Edmonton. (2012). Municipal census results. Retrieved from http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/facts_figures/municipal-census-results.aspx
- Grey Literature Network Service. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.greynet.org/>
- Hoyer, J. (2011). Information is social: Information literacy in context. *Reference Services Review*, 39(1), 10-23.
- Krekoski, E. (2008). Community consultations on research needs: Final report. Edmonton, AB: Edmonton Social Planning Council. Retrieved from http://www.threesource.ca/documents/ESPCarchives/2000s/2008_communityconsultation.pdf
- Homeward Trust Edmonton. (2012). Homeless count. Retrieved from <http://www.homewardtrust.ca/programs/homeless-count.php>
- Public Interest Alberta. (2012). Statistics of low-wage workers in Alberta. Retrieved from <http://pialberta.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Edmonton%20Low-Wage%20Fact%20Sheet-2012%20Statistics%20Canada%20Data%20-2012-06-11.pdf>
- Statistics Canada. (2012). Table 202-0802: Persons in low income families, persons under 18 years, Alberta, annual. Retrieved from CANSIM database.