Return vs. Value: How to communicate your library collection’s impact

**Return on Investment (ROI)**
- Direct value calculation; examines the present value of the collection to the user community and demonstrates how financial resources are invested to support information needs
- Does not provide evidence for how or why library collections are used

- Allows librarians to develop long-term collection strategies by identifying collection gaps, shifts in research interests, or evolving program requirements
- Does not provide insight into immediate collection usage trends

- Allocates scarce resources or selects alternative collection materials
- Identifies recurring and non-recurring costs
- Resource allocations do not shift at the same pace as research interests or information needs

- Answers questions like: What materials are being used today? Are collections of value to users today?
- Does not measure what users do with collection materials after discovery and access

- Promotes transparent and accountable collection budget management
- Provides evidence that resources support existing information needs
- Does not link collections to research output, teaching objectives, or the reputation of the institution

**Value of Investment (VOI)**
- Indirect value calculation; examines outputs and outcomes, like publications and citations, that link collections to the overall value of the library and the institution over time
- Difficult to collect evidence of collection impact when benefits of use may not be evident for months or years

- Allows librarians to develop long-term collection strategies by identifying collection gaps, shifts in research interests, or evolving program requirements
- Does not provide insight into immediate collection usage trends

- Holistic collection view promotes effective curation and strategic management of resources over time
- Reduces the overall risk of resource investment and collection decisions
- Measures future return on investment and may not measure current recurring and non-recurring costs

- Answers questions like: How and why do materials support research, teaching, and learning activities? How does information funnel through the research cycle?
- Does not indicate how users discover or access collection materials

- Links collections to the value of the institution by providing evidence for research output, student retention rates, grant funding, and teaching excellence
- Demonstrates how collections align with institutional goals and priorities
- Does not provide evidence that supports immediate budget management activities

**NEXT STEPS:**
Create a big picture assessment that is sure to impress decision-makers. First, measure the value of your collection today with ROI and over time using VOI principles to showcase the full impact of your library.

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