

Community-Led Libraries Toolkit



**Working
Together**

STARTING US ALL DOWN THE PATH TOWARD DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

engage

collaborate

participate

welcome.

wayfinder



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almost ready?



Overview

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great... lets get started



Preface: Why Working Together

By Brian Campbell

Founding Director and former National Director (*retired*)

Working Together Project

Vancouver Public Library (VPL) initiated the Working Together Project¹ in 2004 to develop methods for libraries to work with low-income communities through a community development approach. Funded as a demonstration project by the Office of Learning Technologies of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, funding was available over three years which was extended to four. The long-term funding was invaluable, allowing the participating libraries both to undertake the lengthy process of understanding and implementing community development approaches and to incorporate some of their lessons into their library systems. Unfortunately, program and funding constraints centred the Project on urban communities, despite recognition that rural libraries have similar issues.

Why was such a project necessary?

The dominant belief in 2004, as it is today, was that libraries serve the whole population and are open to all who choose to use it. Indeed, libraries have instituted many programs to reach out beyond their buildings. Libraries view themselves—and are viewed by many users—as the “living room” of the community. They score well in surveys of public services, often ranking just behind the public safety services such as fire and police.

However, other surveys echo library statistics showing that the whole community is not using the library. Usage statistics were particularly troublesome in urban areas with high concentrations of poor, immigrant, and socially excluded individuals. British librarian John Pateman estimated that 40 percent of his community were not library users and 30 percent were marginal users.

Based on their experience directly serving patrons, library staff at VPL and across Canada expressed concern that libraries were no longer serving poor and socially excluded people. Many staff pointed to the increasing number of rules, the impact of fines, and the focus on information technology as alarming factors.

This situation is not peculiar to libraries. A substantial body of literature, including the Royal Commission on Poverty (1968) and literature pre-dating the Commission’s report, demonstrates that government offices, schools, and hospitals are alien and frightening to many who are socially excluded. Such government institutions—public libraries included—primarily serve the middle class, and so are alienating to many people.

What then is to be done if we are serious about serving the whole community?

¹ *The Libraries in Marginal Communities Demonstration Project* started on February 25, 2004 and ended on October 31, 2005. The *Working Together Project*, which started on November 1, 2005 and is scheduled to end on April 30, 2008, evolves the philosophies and concepts of the first demonstration project. Throughout the Toolkit, these two related demonstration projects are referred to collectively as “the Working Together Project” or “the Project.”

The initial *Libraries in Marginal Communities Demonstration Project* proposal outlined the basic philosophy of the Project:

Librarians have important skills and information to share with low-income communities. The community has important knowledge of itself. The effort in this project will be to take a community development approach to putting library skills at the service of the community by working with them to link library services to community understanding of its needs.

The first phase of the Project placed Community Development Librarians (CDLs) in the community to find out what was actually happening and how public libraries were perceived. While libraries had made attempts in the past to use a community development approach, with a few exceptions, it has been decades since there was a systematic effort across the profession.

A significant shock for the CDLs was to discover that many people are critical and even angry at libraries because of their experiences. Many did not think of the library as a place for them. “Their kind” was not welcome. This response is verified by the many discussions within libraries concerning smelly users, inappropriately dressed patrons, and people sleeping in cubicles and with their head on tables.

Fines and charges were quickly identified as a barrier for low-income individuals during this first phase. Children are often discouraged from using the library for fear of accruing fines. One of the most significant early debates within the Project was whether fines should be eliminated, especially for children, and what would be the financial impact on libraries. Interestingly, the issue of encouraging “responsible use” became another important debate within the first years of the Project, a debate which often overshadowed the need to encourage socially excluded people to even enter the library.

The insights gained in the first phase of the Project resulted in its renaming. First named *Libraries in Marginal Communities*, the CDLs understood that the name implied a one way relationship and not the mutual and reciprocal relationship our philosophy encouraged. The Project was renamed *Working Together: Library - Community Connections*.

The Project also began to understand the gulf that exists between outreach—libraries’ usual approach to communities—and *community development*, an important distinction that is discussed later in this Toolkit.

this way



“...change

While there are many specific library policies that work against socially excluded individuals, the Project gradually grew to understand that the issues confronting the socially excluded were much larger than individual policies. The culture and environment of the library is also problematic. As a bureaucratic institution, the library develops policies and procedures that simplify and ease the efforts required to maintain a stable organisation, not the least of which is the comfort and convenience of the staff and administration, as well as the interest of its mainstream socio-economically advantaged users.

Sustainability is crucial to the success of such an approach. Too often, attempts to reach out to socially excluded non-library users result in token programs or services tangential to the overall service structure of the library. This partition of services exposes such services during the next financial crisis. If the Working Together Project has shown anything, it is that working with socially excluded people to meet their library needs requires far more than just re-organising existing programs and delivery. Acknowledging that current library models do not work for many socially excluded people necessarily acknowledges the need for more fundamental change. It recognises that change is an ongoing process and that initial attempts, while perhaps partial and modestly effective, are still an important beginning.

In essence, a single staff position or policy change will not be sufficient. Transforming staff roles to work with socially excluded communities means changing the way we look at planning, customer service, and policy. It means moving toward a model in which every user is viewed as a complex individual, with history and community, requiring human contact to fully meet their needs. Such a transformation shifts the library back to its human roots.

Importantly, those excluded by current service approaches extend far beyond those defined as socially excluded to include major demographic sectors such as seniors, youth, and children. While the Project's community development approach has been oriented to socially excluded communities, the lessons and approaches are important to radically transform traditional library service for us all.

...is an ongoing process”

Introduction: Community-Led Libraries Toolkit

By Sandra Singh

National Director, Working Together Project

Director of Systems and Special Projects, Vancouver Public Library

FOUR YEARS OF LEARNING ...

Over the past four years, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) has funded two related demonstration projects—referred to collectively in this Toolkit as the **Working Together Project** or the **Project²**—that explored the application of community development techniques in developing more inclusive public library services. Led by Vancouver Public Library, the partner libraries—Halifax Public Libraries, Toronto Public Library, and Regina Public Library—have all invested significantly in this exploration. This investment is an important recognition by four of Canada’s largest urban public library systems that public libraries need to find new and better ways of understanding and serving socially excluded community members if our institutions are to play the important social and economic roles we aspire to fulfil.

During the course of our work, we have sought to achieve two main objectives:

1

Through establishing ongoing relationships with socially excluded people, work collaboratively with socially excluded communities to articulate and respond to their library service wants and needs.

2

Identify and examine systemic barriers to library use for socially excluded people and propose policy and procedural change to address these barriers, including the development of an inclusive service planning model.

In order to achieve these objectives, Project staff have been working in four urban neighbourhoods across the country with populations who have been alienated from or who do not feel welcome in the public library. Using community development techniques, staff have been working to both understand the barriers faced by community members and to collaborate with them to eliminate barriers and plan relevant services that meet their self-articulated needs.

² *The Libraries in Marginal Communities Demonstration Project* started on February 25, 2004 and ended on October 31, 2005. The *Working Together Project*, which started on November 1, 2005 and is scheduled to end on April 30, 2008, evolves the philosophies and concepts of the first demonstration project.

follow me



Our experiences over the past four years have led us to six key lessons:

- Library culture, along with rules and procedures, create significant barriers to inclusion.
- Libraries must recognise that *same* or *consistent* customer service, which does not take into account socio-economic disparity, results in inequitable services that further disadvantage socially excluded people.
- Planning relevant and effective library services for socially excluded community members requires a collaboration of equals between the community members and the library.
- Relationship building is at the core of effective service planning.
- Staff “soft skills” such as empathy, interpersonal competence, and open-mindedness are essential.
- People want to see themselves represented in the library and to have an opportunity to participate.



SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES ...

Drawing on the experiences of the four Working Together Project libraries, **The Community-Led Libraries Toolkit** discusses the techniques used by the Project staff as they worked with their communities both to identify and eliminate barriers to service and to develop and test a service model in which socially excluded people can actively participate as equals in library decision making and planning.

The Toolkit has some specific objectives:

- To increase libraries’ understanding of the unintended consequences of traditional library policy, procedure, and practice.
- To improve our understanding of the different ways libraries have traditionally involved communities and to promote a community-led approach for service to socially excluded communities.
- To support lasting improvements in the provision of inclusive and accessible library services for socially excluded communities.
- To facilitate the empowerment of socially excluded community members through participatory service planning processes.
- To foster constructive and collaborative working relationships between libraries and socially excluded communities.

To achieve these objectives, **The Community-Led Libraries Toolkit** provides philosophical and practical guidance for all stages of the library service planning process, from developing an understanding of community and needs identification through library policy development, service planning, day-to-day customer service, staff development, and evaluation. In addition to being a valuable resource for managers and librarians working with socially excluded communities, the Toolkit content should also be useful for any staff seeking to develop community-led practices, regardless of the social or socio-economic group they most directly serve.

The Toolkit is comprised of three main sections:

1

Part I Overview: Social Exclusion, Public Libraries, and the Working Together Project

Includes background and context for the Project and its experiences.

2

Part II Community-Led Service Planning: Developing Inclusive Public Libraries

Discusses systemic barriers to library service and presents *The Community-Led Service Planning Model*. This part also contains eight **Tools** for use by staff in conjunction with the Community-Led Service Planning Model.

3

Part III Supporting the Inclusive Public Library

Identifies and discusses the institutional conditions necessary to support the inclusive public library, including discussions on policy development and application, staff development, and service evaluation.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER ...

Public libraries have the potential to be one of our community's most important social institutions.

Already, we are recognised as important contributors to early childhood education, economic prosperity, cultural diversity, literacy, and lifelong learning. Now, we just need to openly acknowledge that we fulfil these important roles for primarily the middle class and/or those already able to confidently engage in community life.

We need to change the lens through which we view ourselves, our processes, and our services. Our new lenses need to be those of socially excluded communities—we need to understand how the library looks and feels to them. From there, it is a simple process change—changing the way we engage so that planning and decision making is collaborative and participatory.

The Working Together Project has been experimenting with various techniques for achieving this evolution for the past four years and we are pleased to share our experiences and learnings with our public library colleagues across the country through this **Community-Led Libraries Toolkit**.

Implementation of the Community-Led Service Planning Model will start us all down the path toward creating a dynamic and engaging social institution that is responsive to and inclusive of our whole community in ways that respond to their unique and diverse needs. Getting there may not be without its challenges, but our hope is that this Toolkit, which is based in experience and designed to help move libraries/library staff through these challenges, will provide valuable assistance.

Social Exclusion

By Annette DeFaveri

National Coordinator, Working Together Project

Public libraries are often described as inclusive, neutral, and barrier-free institutions. Our mandates and mission statements include commitments to providing equal access to all community members, creating welcoming environments, and reflecting the diversity of our communities. Libraries appear to be the definition of inclusive institutions. We seem to embody the values necessary to build inclusive communities. Ask any librarian if the library is an inclusive institution and the answer will likely be yes.

It is clear, however, from library literature and our experiences, that libraries serve some segments of the community better than others, and some segments not at all. This tells us that libraries are not truly inclusive and emphasises the need to discuss policies, practices, services, and attitudes that inhibit inclusion.

When the Working Together Project asked librarians to talk about developing inclusive library practices and services, discussions stalled. Many librarians were hesitant to discuss social inclusion issues with us because they believed that the library already was inclusive. Some librarians cited long open hours, appropriate physical access, and creative programming as evidence of inclusiveness. Others defined inclusiveness by describing their own comfort level serving anyone who walked through the library's doors and by their personal commitment to developing original programming. The dilemma for the Project was to have discussions about inclusion that went past personal definitions and further than asset-focused examples.

To begin discussions about social inclusion and libraries, the Project started discussing *social exclusion* and communities. Social exclusion should be understood in broad terms. It can affect any stratum of our society, including people who are poor or live in poverty, people who are unemployed or underemployed, and people who are members of ethnic or cultural minorities. Being excluded can mean being alienated from the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the community because of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class. Excluded communities can include new immigrants, refugees, the working poor, and groups that have been historically isolated such as African Nova Scotians and First Nations people. For some people, being excluded can stem from, or bring about, drug addiction, mental illness, and homelessness. The conditions that define social exclusion can often be multiple.



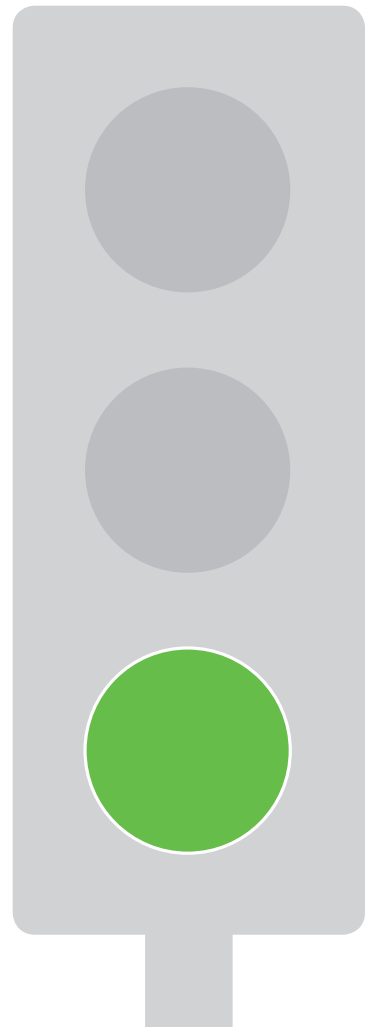
it's not a good feeling

When we focused on social exclusion, we learned from community members how exclusion affects their lives and defines their needs. We discovered that library services we thought of as inclusive fell short of meeting many community needs and were, in some cases, alienating to community members. We learned about individuals such as one teen who was afraid to come in to the library because he was sure the security gates would alert staff to his fines. The teen believed that library staff would take his skateboard in lieu of the money he did not have to pay those fines. We learned about a group of moms who, after attending one story time, never came back to another. They were embarrassed because they had talked while the librarian sang, and were told not to do so. In one community, physically disabled people, parents with strollers, and elderly community members could not navigate the steep rough path that was the only walkway from the bus stop to the library.

At a conceptual level, libraries may appear to be inclusive institutions, but whether this is reflected in the realities of service prioritisation, the manner in which services are delivered, and the institutional culture must be continuously questioned.

Ultimately, the Project learned that it is impossible to conceive of inclusive services without first understanding social exclusion. We had to transcend conceptual definitions and focus on a critical assessment of our existing practices and services. Understanding that there is social exclusion in our communities and recognizing that it does keep people from engaging with mainstream institutions such as public libraries is necessary before we can create truly inclusive libraries.

...lets change that



Working Together Project Sites: Overview

Project Communities

After receiving funding confirmation from HRSDC, the Vancouver Public Library selected three additional library systems to participate in the Project based on their population demographics, previous experience working with socially excluded communities, and commitment to the goals of the Project. Each library system then selected a community with which to work. In each case, the focus was on connecting with socially excluded people who were not using the library.

VANCOUVER

Vancouver Public Library identified Mount Pleasant, a culturally-diverse neighbourhood located just outside of the downtown core, as its Project community. Mount Pleasant is characterized by a higher-than-average level of poverty, with the most recent census data suggesting that just over one-third of the community are low-income households. Due to its history as a low-income neighbourhood, the community is home to a number of social service agencies. In Mount Pleasant, poverty creates the exclusion that defines many community members' lives. The neighbourhood is also undergoing rapid change as parts of the community gentrify.

HALIFAX

Halifax Public Libraries focused their work on the Greystone public housing community and the 500 block of Herring Cove Road. As Greystone is public housing, all residents have low incomes and most receive income assistance. The units include families with children, seniors, and adults receiving a disability pension. About 15% of the residents are African Nova Scotian. The community is geographically isolated on a steep hill with one road leading to it. Grocery stores, banks, the library, and other services are two kilometres away. Residents have low literacy and high unemployment. The exclusion many residents experience is compounded by their geographical isolation.

TORONTO

The Toronto Public Library decided to work in two communities: Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park. Many new immigrants, beginning in the 1970s and continuing today, settled in these neighbourhoods. Flemingdon Park is a diverse community with roots in the Caribbean, Africa, South East Asia, China, and other parts of the world. Thorncliffe Park has a high concentration of Muslims, mainly from South East Asia. Among the many languages spoken in these communities, the main ones are Tamil, Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi, and Tagalog.

Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park are very densely housed communities of high-rise apartments. Both communities have high poverty rates and overcrowding. Settlement assistance is in high demand by the ongoing influx of newcomers. Education levels are generally high, but unemployment and underemployment are challenges, along with inclusion in Canadian society and economy. Many adults in these communities, particularly recent immigrants, face challenges accessing ESL classes and skills training, as well as barriers to recognition of overseas experience or qualifications.

REGINA

The Regina Public Library selected North Central Regina, which has a population of 10,500 people. The Aboriginal population, which comprises forty percent of the North Central population, is increasing rapidly as families move from rural areas to the city. Many people in the community live in poverty, have low literacy skills, and lack the skills needed to compete in the workforce. In addition, many youth and seniors are isolated within the community. The unemployment rate is high at 15%, compared to 4.2% for the rest of Regina. There is a high rate of transience and many of the houses in the community are old and in poor repair.

Although the Albert Library has had a Community Advisory Committee for over twenty years, the branch is still not reaching many segments of the community. Many residents feel that the library has nothing to offer them and are not comfortable using it.

Establishing the Community Development Librarian Position

The role of the Community Development Librarian (CDL) was fundamental to the Working Together Project. The attitudes and new skills required to work successfully outside the library and with socially excluded community members were tested and embedded in the requirements for this position. CDLs developed new ways of collaborating and partnering with community members, while working with community members to address questions of service equity, systemic barriers, and inclusive library practices. Insights and models for new methods of community-led library work were mediated through this position.

Initially, the Project sought to establish the Community Development Librarian position as a permanent position in the Project's partner libraries. In some cases, this was appropriate and successful. In other cases, libraries made the decision to incorporate the attitudes, qualities, and skills of the CDL into existing positions and job descriptions because they viewed such skills and attributes as important for all library staff if systemic change were to be achieved. The process of redefining the role of the librarian in the community began with the CDL position and will continue in each partner library after the Working Together Project ends.



Community Engagement in Context

Over the life of the Working Together Project, we have answered many questions about the difference between community development and outreach and have seen recent literature that even uses the two phrases interchangeably. Likewise, we have heard some confusion about the difference between consulting the community and collaborating with the community. The following discussion clarifies the differences between outreach, consultation, community development, and community development in a library context. Its intent is to provide context for the Community-Led Service Planning Model.

Types of Community Engagement

OUTREACH

Outreach is a long-standing public library service. At its core, outreach involves delivering a message that the library believes to be important, such as that reading to your pre-schoolers is important for early literacy development, that the library has important online resources that will help high-school students do their homework, or that the library offers a wide-array of services with broad appeal.

As staff, we decide on a format that these messages will take—perhaps a storytime visit to a new mother’s drop-in, a books-for-babies campaign, an online research program at the local high school, or a library talk at the local neighbourhood house. If we have not already identified a location—often as a result of a community request or by our needs assessment—we find places that will allow us to come and deliver the program, message, or service. Our hope is that people begin to understand that the library is an important community resource.

In all cases, the purpose is the same: we have a message that we need to convey, so we create a service, program, or presentation that allows us to convey the message and then take it out into the community to ensure people understand the important services we offer.

Outreach happens in the community. The librarian is the authority, and the focus is on “information out” or service delivery.

CONSULTATION

Consultation is another long-standing tradition in libraries. We are constantly trying to understand our users and what they want from the library. Often, to do this, we use consultation tools such as surveys, comment cards, polls, or focus groups. Consultation, however, is wholly focused on getting information on what the community wants or needs. After the results of consultation have been gathered, libraries have traditionally worked in-house to develop service responses.

Consultation can happen in the library or in the community. The library is asking for feedback, and the focus is on “information in” or hearing from the community. Importantly, traditional consultation techniques favour existing library users and/or economically-advantaged, engaged, and confident non-users.

SOCIAL/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Public libraries have long been active partners in many local social development initiatives. Libraries sit as service provider partners at the table during community undertakings, such as the development of community-wide crime reduction strategies, literacy initiatives, or early childhood education strategies. By participating in these activities, the library is a partner in what we would consider traditional social development initiatives. When libraries talk about their community development activities, they are usually speaking about this type of engagement. When libraries discuss their community development focused partnerships, they are most commonly referring to this type of service-provider-to-service-provider social development focused partnership.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN A LIBRARY CONTEXT

When the Working Together Project discusses *community development in a library context*, we are referring to the application and evolution of philosophies and techniques that community developers use to work with communities within the context of library service planning. In particular, we use it within the context of working directly with socially excluded people in our communities to plan services.

The focus of community development in a library context goes beyond receiving feedback or hearing from the community (consultation or “information in”) and extends to encompass meaningful and active community member engagement in service prioritization and planning.

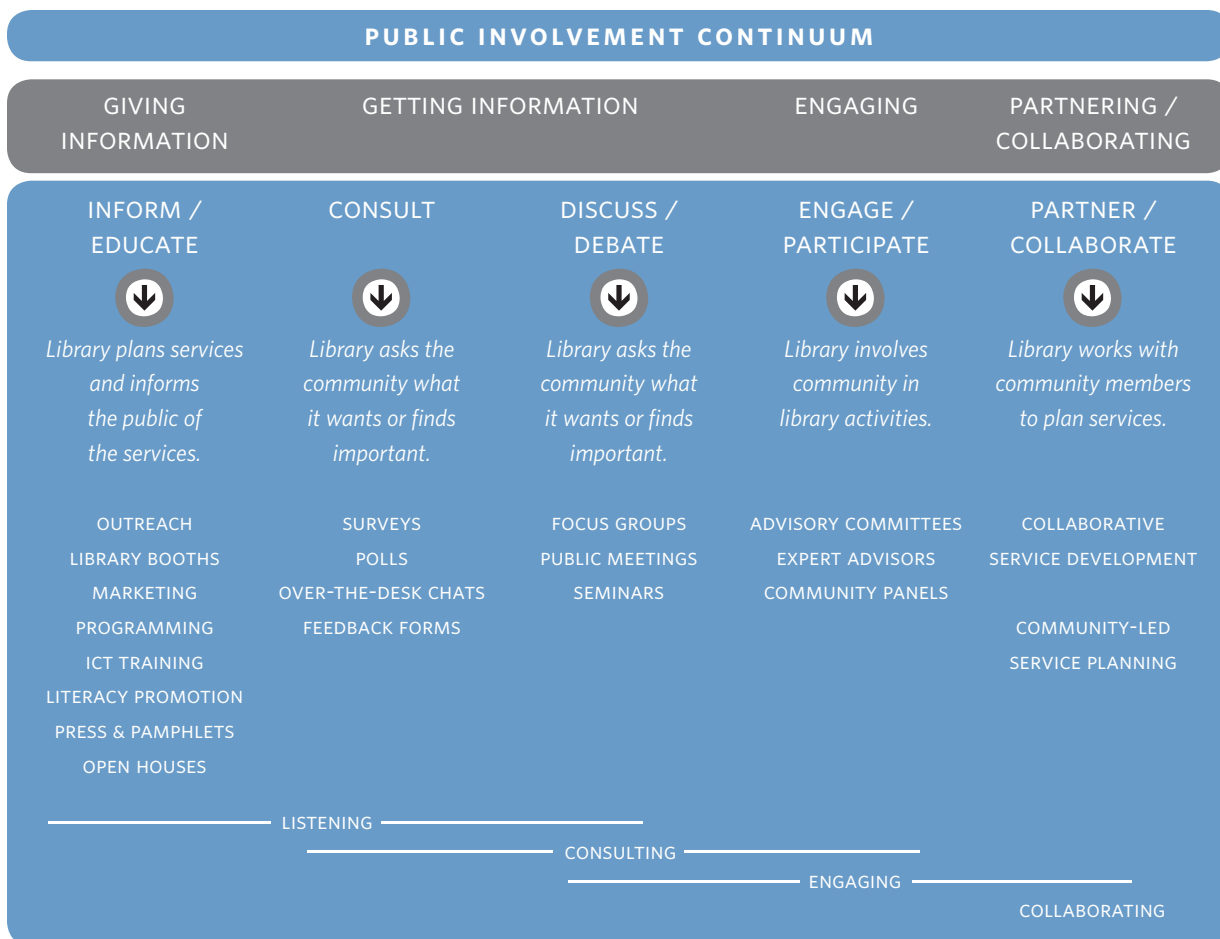
Community Engagement in Context

The continuum on the following page illustrates increasing user engagement in service development as one moves from left to right. On the far left of the continuum, the library is in charge of determining what community needs it will respond to and how it will respond to them, and the relationship with the community is one in which the library informs and educates the community about library services. As we move toward the right, we see increasing concentration on hearing from the user. Further right, we see engagement of the community on panels and committees and, to the far right, we see the community leading the library. Hence, *community-led libraries*.

see for yourself



The various types of community engagement are charted below. Please note that the *partnering* in the right column is traditionally with other service organisations as referred to above in the discussion of Community Development.



There is a role for each of these ranges of engagement in library services and libraries will need to think strategically about when and where each technique is best used.

However, the Working Together Project strongly advocates the partnering/collaborating model when developing services for socially excluded communities. Our experience with the Community-Led Service Planning Model has shown that this highly collaborative approach is what works when trying to engage socially excluded community members in library services. It is the model which allows us to truly see the library through the community's eyes, allows the library to learn from the community's experiences and perspectives, and allows the library to engage them in decision making and planning. It demonstrates to socially excluded community members that we trust them, believe in them, and value them as highly as other users. This model will allow public libraries to evolve into truly inclusive social institutions.



Community-Led Service Planning

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here we go



Using the Tools

The **Community-Led Libraries Toolkit** is designed for library staff fulfilling diverse roles—from those who serve the community directly at the circulation desk to those who plan services, develop policy, or manage library operations. The Toolkit provides background and contextual information, case studies, issues to consider, and reflections from the Working Together Project team.

However, the Tools in this Toolkit are not intended to be prescriptive step-by-step instructions: they are intended to provide practical advice and to share experiences. Each library and library staff member can consider the strategies and activities and can then implement or modify them to suit their unique communities.

The Tools are based on the experiences of the Project team at all stages of the service planning process—from learning about our communities and first contact through service planning and evaluation. The Tools are both a reference and a guide to help you work collaboratively with socially excluded communities.

The Toolkit is organised sequentially, with each section building directly upon the previous section. For this reason, it is important to review the overarching Community-Led Service Model first. After this, work your way through the Tools until the final section in which we provide some guidance on the environmental factors required to sustain the inclusive public library.

Please keep in mind that these are not all-encompassing tools. Rather, they are meant to assist each library with getting started on the path of community-led service planning. Using the Tools will not mean that you will not make mistakes when working with the community. Certain aspects of this type of work are very nuanced, and the community can be very sensitive, depending on their history with service providers and institutions. As such, this type of work requires flexibility and resilience. This Toolkit is intended to provide you with a chance to learn from our experiences. As you begin to develop skills in these areas, you will no doubt learn from your own experiences as well.



yes, there will be a few

SOME ADVICE

One of the greatest challenges of a community-led process is working to the community's timetable. As library staff, we have many responsibilities, deadlines, and accountabilities. The pressures of these imperatives, combined with both our desire to see immediate results from our efforts and a sincere wish to offer assistance when we see a need, can be very strong and may tempt us to make decisions on behalf of the community or to jump to assumptions and solutions before considering the issues in collaboration with the community.

Be patient and take the necessary time to involve the community in the priority setting and planning. This process is not just about offering a service or developing a collection: it is about building and strengthening the abilities of socially excluded community members to engage in the library—not just as service recipients, but as active and confident community members. Sometimes, the most important outcome of community-led service planning is not the actual products or services, but the change in socially excluded community members' sense of their importance to the library, their right to be involved, and their ability and confidence to engage. For ourselves, the intangible shift in library culture takes time and patience. It will not happen overnight, but will happen one interaction at a time.

Overall, it is always important to keep in mind that our role in the community is not to tell community members what they need or identify the best service for their needs. Rather, our role is to facilitate the process of identifying and articulating their needs. You probably have creative ideas, special skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities, all of which could achieve a tangible service output immediately. However, your solution might not be the one the community would have chosen and developed if involved collaboratively, and you will have missed the important opportunity for capacity and confidence building. Instead, use your expertise, skills, and knowledge to facilitate the discussion and implementation of the community's self-identified solution.

You will really have achieved the goal of inclusive service planning when socially excluded community members feel that the library is their library and that they have a voice and sense of belonging.

...lets do it anyway



Systemic Barriers

For every person who finds the library safe and pleasant, there is another person who feels uncomfortable and unwelcome. This is a hard truth to accept, especially for people who see the library as one of society's truly accessible and equitable institutions. Identifying the barriers that keep socially excluded groups from using the library, understanding why the barriers exist, and finding ways to overcome the barriers is an iterative process.

- Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

Systemic barriers are elements of library policy or practice that impede community members from having full and equitable access to libraries.

Working to identify and dismantle barriers ensures a public library that is proactively providing access to all community members, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, economic position, literacy level, mental health, physical health, political view, or any other factor.



LIBRARIES, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Discussions with some street involved youth and with some men recently released from federal prison revealed that the security gates were a significant barrier to using the library. They asked "will the metal from body piercings set off the alarm?"... "What about a can of pepper spray or a knife?"... "How about a heavy chain belt?" People talked about being embarrassed if the gates went off and worse, wanted to know if they would be searched. If so, will staff find the joint in the back pocket resulting in an arrest for possession? All these questions and concerns about the security gates made the library seem like a risky place.

- Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian

Many barriers to accessing library service result from the differences between how libraries and library staff perceive the needs of socially excluded people and how socially excluded people perceive their own needs. As a result, policies, programs, and services designed without input from socially excluded people can create barriers, despite the best intentions of library staff.

While it is important to remember that individuals have vastly different reactions to barriers and to socially excluding factors in their lives, the reality is that the communities served by libraries include people who have not graduated from high school, who struggle with literacy, who have difficulty finding employment, or who must work two or more jobs to support their families. Many community members cannot afford a telephone or a place to live. It is not unusual to meet people who feel like strangers in their own communities. People who feel alienated from their communities may also feel uncomfortable accessing library services and unwelcome at the library.

Feeling unwelcome and alienated from the library is not limited to society's more marginalized groups. For many working class adults, the library is as foreign as a university or a museum. Even relatively well-off working class people may not have a tradition of library use and so may feel that their lives, their values, and their concerns are not reflected in the library.

For many socially excluded people, the library mystifies the acquisition of information. Specially designed software for our catalogues, the Dewey Decimal system, and our subject headings are all examples of ways the library distances itself from the community. Most disturbing, however, is that many socially excluded people believe that they are required to know and understand these "codes" before they can use the library. Such an understanding will often prevent people from approaching the library or library staff. As staff, we need to ensure that we are open and accessible so that people who have developed such an understanding or perception feel comfortable asking questions.

There is no lack of stories—from within the Project and elsewhere—of how libraries create barriers to access for some community members. The Project heard from homeless families unwilling to make use of social services, including the library, for fear of losing their children and from individuals who went years wanting to borrow from the library, but did not because they could not afford to pay outstanding, and in some cases very minimal, fines. Despite the library's intentions, there are community members who are excluded from the library because of how they perceive the library or because of library policies and practices.

There are several examples across Canada of public library service to socially excluded communities. These include the Carnegie Centre in Vancouver, the Albert branch in Regina, the Parkdale branch in Toronto, and the North branch in Halifax. These library branches, and others, are able to provide services to socially excluded communities, but often struggle with insufficient funding and the larger systemic barriers that exist within their municipal or regional library systems. They are emerging models of what library service to socially excluded communities could be, but they are often isolated to one particular geographic area and operate as the exception rather than the norm.

For libraries to be truly accessible, we must acknowledge and address the barriers that socially excluded people face. Library efforts to ensure institutional inclusion should be comprehensive and systemic.

more access



! COMMUNITY AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Systemic barriers will vary from library to library and community to community.

Barriers are pervasive, and they flow both up and down within any institution—sometimes they are the result of institutional goals at the board and management level, while other times they emerge from the personal beliefs of staff at the public service level. For librarians working in socially excluded communities, it is important to acknowledge this and begin by being aware of the barriers our own beliefs might present.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Barriers to accessing library services confront socially excluded people in many ways: late fines present a fiscal barrier; security gates present a physical and psychological barrier; times for library storytimes present a barrier when the event is planned without coordination with the bus schedule. There are many other barriers that socially excluded people face when they attempt to interact with the library. These library-created barriers can be easily navigated by patrons who understand their rights and the library’s role in the community. Likewise, addressing barriers is easier for people who are confident expressing themselves and their needs. Socially excluded people often lack the financial stability, education level, sense of entitlement, and empowerment needed to overcome barriers.

Barriers to library service experienced by some members of the community can be a difficult topic to broach given the genuine commitment library staff bring to the principle of universal access. Many staff members are approachable as individuals, and libraries are able to point to many examples of inclusion. Examples such as welcoming homeless people into the library or providing services for new Canadians are often cited. However, there are many exceptions. Project librarians heard from many people who were not comfortable using the library. Some people said that libraries are like a club and they do not feel like members. Others said that they did not understand how to find things and asking for help would show that they were not smart. Still others said they were too embarrassed to ask for help.

For some community members, libraries can be oppressive. Their rules and codes can be alienating and staff can be seen as unapproachable or intimidating. Libraries require identification and proof of address for membership, charge fines for overdue materials, and have policies about behaviour, such as being a “smelly patron” or a loud teen playing games at the computer station. Libraries implement policies and architecture that distance staff from patrons and use complex jargon to discuss services. Many socially excluded people do not feel welcome in the library, and *the reality is that they are often not welcome.*

Systemic barriers cannot be eliminated by staff discussing policy and making recommendations. Staff cannot assess the barriers to library services faced by socially excluded people because they are not themselves socially excluded. In order to identify, acknowledge, and address systemic barriers, we must involve community members who experience barriers.

Our obligation to identify and eliminate barriers to library access is directly linked to the role of the public library in society. The American Library Association's mission statement explains that the role of the library is to "ensure access to information for all." The Canadian Library Association describes free universal access to information as a "key component of an open and democratic society."

Public libraries have a civic responsibility to serve all community members. Meeting this responsibility means acknowledging that not all community members are comfortable engaging library services and then developing ways to change this situation.

The Working Together Project recognized that a new approach could ensure that public libraries evolve to provide opportunities for access and use by all. By identifying the challenges socially excluded people in our communities experience, barriers to access and service would be identified and strategies to eliminate the barriers could be explored. One of the Project's fundamental principles is that the community identifies the barriers and the community participates in the solutions.

- Heather Davis, Supervisor



The Community-Led Service Planning Model

A service planning model is the philosophical and practical framework that guides the work of the library. A service planning model details the process for assessing our community's needs, identifying service priorities, planning and implementing services, programs and collections, and evaluating activities.

Sometimes, a service model is well articulated and detailed within an organisation and, other times, it may not be obvious or evident, but exists all the same. The advantage of a well-expressed service model is that it enhances the work of library staff by providing the reasons, stages, and methods for doing library work and for serving the community.

When the Working Together Project began, we thought we would develop several service models for such activities as collection development, program planning, and computer training courses. As the Project evolved, and as we gained more experience and insight, we realised that all the approaches and techniques—regardless of the service planned or the community being served—were variations on one overarching service planning model.

The first iterations of the service model were called the Community Development Planning Model. This proved to be a limiting and sometimes confusing title. As a term, *community development* is closely associated with two specific aspects of library work: establishing partnerships with community groups and developing library programs. Referring to the service model as a Community-Led Service Planning Model is meant to reflect the broad range of its application, reaching beyond those areas commonly associated with traditional community development work.

How does the Community-Led Service Planning Model differ from a traditional service planning model?

Most service planning models include, in some form, the following stages or components: community assessment, needs identification, service planning, service delivery, and evaluation. The Community-Led Service Planning Model shares these components with traditional library service planning models, but the ways the Model is interpreted and applied at every stage differ markedly from the traditional service model.

The Traditional Model



COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

A traditional library service planning model relies heavily on data sources such as collection use statistics, user surveys, census information, demographics, and comment cards to understand a community's needs and to plan library services. The challenge with these inputs is that socially excluded people are not always represented.

Collection use statistics, user surveys, and comment cards represent existing library users. For example, comment cards are filled out by people who are in the library and have the confidence to express their views in written form. Traditional attempts at including non-users—such as telephone surveys—only reach people who have stable housing, traditional telephone service, and wish to participate in (often) complex verbal transactions. It is not reasonable to expect people to articulate (to a stranger over the telephone) the changes they would like to see in a service that they have never used.

Demographic data do not really help illuminate the social realities of community members' lives. Intellectually, library staff may know that 45% of the community's families are living below the poverty line, but what does this mean for peoples' daily lives and their use of the library? What are the emotional and psychological impacts of such economic pressures? What does it feel like to approach a circulation desk with your child, worried about library staff's reaction to unpaid fines, but with no means to pay? Demographic data does not adequately capture the complexity and concerns of socially excluded community members' lives, nor the resulting needs that they have of the library.



TRADITIONAL SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY

Library staff are the creative and intellectual force behind policy, program, and service development in a traditional service planning model.

A traditional model asks staff or staff committees to develop services and service proposals that address identified service priorities. Traditionally, library staff consult other staff members in their own and in other libraries for ideas on how to meet service priorities. In-depth work may involve literature reviews and attending relevant conference or training sessions that have been prepared and presented by library staff or members of related professions. Another common practice is to adopt other libraries' services, perhaps allowing for staff-identified nuances that make implementation seem more suitable for the targeted local community.

Examination of traditional service planning and delivery suggests a bias toward considering staff and institutional needs before considering community needs. For example, sometimes library programs such as storytimes are planned around staff schedules and have not included an examination of community concerns such as transportation and bus schedules. At other times, library circulation and reference policies may be drafted to ease staff discomfort in difficult situations without adequate, and sometimes without any, consideration of community members' comfort and dignity.

! TRADITIONAL EVALUATION

Most library evaluation is an in-house activity. Attendance statistics, comment cards, and circulation statistics are common evaluation tools. But do these inputs capture the community's thoughtful and meaningful reflections on library services, programs, and policies? Ten comment cards may say how excellent a program was and may make suggestions for future programs. However, probing further may reveal that many people are reluctant or afraid to criticise the library because it is free or because they think that criticising a service may result in cancellation. The experience of the Working Together Project is that people often mask their opinions, sometimes because critical opinions are more difficult to express politely and sometimes because people do not want to appear unappreciative of a community service. Without a critical element in the evaluation process, and without the means to garner critical assessments, it becomes difficult to both gauge and assess the relevance of a program or service, as well as identify areas for improvement.

A traditional service model rarely articulates a process for including socially excluded communities in the evaluation of library services. This is due, in part, to the nature of exclusion and isolation and, in part, to traditional evaluation tools that are designed for engaged community members who are comfortable and able to respond in ways that libraries recognise.

In Vancouver, we traditionally used telephone surveys to hear from the “non-user” and in-house surveys to survey our users. We were recently faced with the need to plan our regularly scheduled community survey. What we recognised, as a result of the Working Together Project, was there are important parts of our community—mainly the socially excluded—whom neither tool will reach and whose needs cannot be expressed by the dominant middle class. We decided to supplement the telephone survey and in-house survey with focus groups at service providers across the city, in an attempt to hear from socially excluded communities—such as street-involved youth, the working poor, and refugees.

– Diana Guinn, Supervisor

The Community-Led Service Planning Model

A Community-Led Service Planning Model focuses on working collaboratively with the community. Building relationships and partnerships with the community in order to consult with them is the foundation of this model. Understanding the community's needs as the community expresses and prioritises them is essential to developing and enacting the Community-Led Service Planning model. This approach ensures that socially excluded community members, as well as socially mainstream community members, are represented in library planning, services, and policy development. The Community-Led Service Planning Model builds inclusive libraries that are proactively welcoming to all community members.

The community-led service model is an exciting process that allows for unconventional and unanticipated changes to library services.

- Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian

Community involvement and input in service planning and delivery helps us identify those areas of library work that can be better understood and improved for the community served.

- Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

Although the Albert branch [the Working Together Project site in Regina] was working closely with its community before the start of the Project, the community-led approach to library service has brought the library closer to its community, reaching more non-users and, as a result, the branch offers programs and services that better reflect and meet the needs of its community.

- André Gagnon, Supervisor



COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

An understanding of demographic trends and library use is as important in this model as it is in the traditional model. Demographic trends help staff understand the economic state of the community, as well as understand who is not represented in collection use statistics or library surveys. However, this is only the first step to understanding socially excluded communities and the challenges they face in their ability to access and engage library services. Additional information and knowledge about socially excluded communities is not something staff can gather from statistics, comment cards, or telephone surveys.

The way to deepen staff understanding of the needs and wants of socially excluded communities is for staff to leave the library and meet people where they are most comfortable. Once staff meet people outside library walls, in places the community chooses to frequent, staff have the opportunity to hear what people say and to learn from what they have heard.

The Community-Led Service Planning Model emphasises connecting, consulting, and collaborating with community members in order to build relationships and partnerships. This is the first and most critical step toward creating an environment that lets library staff listen to and understand community needs. Building respectful and trusting relationships lets library staff see the library through community eyes. This perspective often reveals barriers to library use as well as new and collaborative ways to build library services that engage previously disengaged or excluded community members.

there's more



Working with communities, the first few times, can be scary... This fear may be caused by the unknown, such as not knowing how community members will respond to you, what they will request, how to respond as a staff person. Start the implementation process with a few small activities, which allow staff and community members to consult with one another (build relationships), and your work will be successful.

– Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian

SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY

Community members are the creative and intellectual force behind policy, program, and service development in the Community-Led Service Planning Model.

The Community-Led Service Planning Model focuses on staff working with the community to develop a community-driven response to community-identified service needs. The library and the community are partners in service planning. Working collaboratively with the community is possible only after staff develop relationships and gain the trust and respect of the people they meet. Accordingly, relationships are the foundation of collaboration.

The emphasis on working collaboratively is also essential for developing collections, planning and implementing programs, and developing policy recommendations. In this service model, library staff work to ensure that community members are active and equal library partners.

Collaboratively planned collections, services, programs, and policies reflect community needs and incorporate community creativity and choices.

We as library staff are not the experts on what our communities want or need in terms of library services—the community is the expert. It is our job to ensure that we develop a library service that reflects the community's needs and vision. We do this with them, not for them.

– Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

share



 EVALUATION

Evaluation in the Community-Led Service Planning Model is a collaborative effort between the library, community members, and community partners. The emphasis is on qualitative evaluation that probes community members' perceptions, experiences, feelings, and opinions about the role of the library in the community and how the library meets community needs. Evaluating library programs and initiatives with community members means more than simply being present and asking questions.

I had to be engaged and inquisitive and caring. I wanted people to know that the library was interested in their stories. I wanted to put names and faces and experiences and feelings on the statistics. In doing so, I hoped that staff members, community members, and stakeholders would have a deeper understanding of how the library can respond to community needs and make a difference in people's lives.

– Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

celebrate our differences



Community-Led Service Planning: Key Differences

		COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT & NEEDS IDENTIFICATION		SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY	
		COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT	NEEDS IDENTIFICATION	SERVICE PLANNING	DELIVERY
TRADITIONAL PLANNING		<p>Staff review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic data, - Library use statistics, - Comment cards, and - Community survey results. 	<p>Staff identify service gaps or under-served communities.</p>	<p>Staff review literature.</p> <p>Staff consult with other staff and service providers.</p> <p>Staff develop service response.</p>	<p>Staff deliver service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop the collection, - hold the program, or - design facilities.
		<p>Staff review all of the above and...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff spend time in community developing relationships with community members. - Staff hear from community about what is important to them. 	<p>Staff discuss with community members and hear from the community what their priorities are.</p>	<p>Service ideas are the community's ideas.</p> <p>Community is engaged in the planning of the service.</p> <p>Staff act as partners and facilitators rather than as creators and teachers.</p>	<p>Community members and staff work together to deliver the service:</p> <p>Community members involved in selecting collection materials.</p> <p>Community members active in hosting the program.</p> <p>Community members working collaboratively with the library to develop policy recommendations.</p>

EVALUATION

Staff review various inputs, such as:

- Feedback forms,
- Program attendance,
- Collection use,
- Library card enrollment, and
- Other statistics.

Staff review various inputs:

- All of the above...

And community and staff discuss:

- How did the process work?
- Did the service/ policy, etc. actually address the need?
- What could have been done differently?

Community-Led Service Planning model in Action

The Community-Led Service Planning Model is not a prescriptive or rigid model. Libraries need to review and experiment with the model, or parts of the model, and work with their communities in ways that are appropriate, respectful, and dynamic for staff and for community members. What is important is that library staff are mindful of both the lens through which they view their role and make service planning decisions, as well as of the community members who may be excluded by those decisions.

In the following example, the methods and strategies of the Community-Led Service Planning Model were adapted for a specific community, blended with existing library practices, and modified to the service being designed.

Some of the questions that all Project librarians asked themselves when working collaboratively with their communities included:

- What techniques, approaches, and information sources helped us learn about the community?
- Were we careful to let community members define their needs? Or did we find ourselves listening to surrogates, such as service provider staff members, instead of talking directly with community members?
- Did we take enough time to elicit suggestions from the community? Or did we find ourselves making enthusiastic recommendations and perhaps taking over, as though we were the experts?
- How did we include community members in the consultation and planning process? Were we careful not to confuse tokenism with true community involvement?
- Were community members involved in the delivery of the program or service? How did we engage community members and support their participation?
- When a program finished, or a service was complete, did we go back to community members and involve them in a collaborative evaluation process? What did we learn from the evaluation? How will we work with community members to incorporate their suggestions?
- Did we meet the community's needs and wants—as they had expressed their needs and wants—in a way that was relevant and significant to them?

just about there



A key thing to note is that this service model is very much about a perspective: one that we take on when we think about the communities we serve and their role in our services. In this respect, the shift to this service model often begins with a shift in thinking. In Vancouver, many staff members have “gotten it” not through customised training, or by reading a manual, but by actively engaging with the philosophy and practise of the service model.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

BEING LED BY YOUTH

As a new Community Development Librarian, I thought the best way to understand why some groups did not use the library was to simply ask them. I met the director of a local youth organisation and asked “Why do the kids who come to this organisation feel unwelcome at the library?” He replied, “Because they’re not welcome at the library.” I don’t know what I had expected to hear, but it was not this. Clearly, my investigation was not going to be as simple as I had thought.

My route to understanding why the library was unwelcoming began with conversations with teens who weren’t coming to the library. I hoped to ask them about making the library a relevant and positive space for them. This wasn’t easy. I was going to have to build relationships with them in order to get them to talk with me honestly and frankly about themselves.

The problem was that I was scared. I was scared that no one would talk to me. I was scared that even though I had done work on “youth at risk and library services,” that I would be revealed as a middle class theoretician when it came to interacting with socially excluded and isolated street kids.

What I had on my side was a committed belief that the library could respond to street kids and would acknowledge their concerns and needs.

I started attending youth drop-ins and youth dinners. I made sure the youth directed the conversations and that I listened to them. I didn’t start to talk until I felt the youth were used to me and had perhaps begun to trust me. I had been vigilant in not coming to drop-ins or dinners with a plan, or an agenda, or a library program to sell. I didn’t tell them what I thought was best for them or why I thought the library could support them. I understood that I was there to learn from the youth, to see the world, the community and the neighbourhood through their eyes, and then, if I was lucky, to see the library through their eyes.

When I eventually started to talk I began by discussing stereotypes, specifically how the youth may be stereotyping me and how the library may be stereotyping them. What emerged from our conversations was a collection of impressions about the library that explained, in part, why these teens didn’t use the library.

...carried over

They said that the library reminded them of high school and that they didn't like high school. Librarians at the reference desk were likened to teachers at a school desk. Few of the kids, if any, had finished high school or had positive experiences with teachers.

They also had little experience with libraries. At one dinner, long after I had been attending on a regular basis, I asked a couple of young women if they had ever been to the library. They said yes, they had both been regularly as young children going to story times with their daycares. They remembered story times fondly, but had no understanding of how to interact with the library as young adults. Their comparable experiences with other large institutions such as schools, social service agencies, and the police were rarely positive and not applicable. Even though the youth lumped the library with those groups, they were not hostile toward the library, but they didn't see it as their space either.

Before the youth entered or engaged with the library they had to feel as if they belonged and were entitled to use the library. It was important to have teens discuss and identify what types of things the library could do for them and not presume that the library, without their input, could make choices for them.

The activities that later resulted from collaborating with this group of youth included installing photographs taken by them in the library gallery and arranging for a youth "graduation ceremony" to happen on a regular basis in library space. The process of deciding what the library could do was as important, if not more important, than the final decisions. By listening to these youth, we showed them that they had ownership of both library processes and library activities. This sense of ownership made library space their space. Eventually the library's Teen Services Librarian was involved with this group and was able to make the graduation ceremonies and art displays a regular part of the library's programming.

The process of regularly attending the teen social evenings and working with the teens to establish informal focus groups built the relationships, and the relationships let us establish a collaborative planning process ensuring that this group of teens had a voice in deciding library services.

– Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

don't forget your tools



The Tools

- ① *Community Entry*
- ② *Community Mapping*
- ③ *Relationship Building*
- ④ *Partnerships*
- ⑤ *Program Planning*
- ⑥ *Computer Training*
- ⑦ *Collection Development*
- ⑧ *Customer Service*

we hope they help.

Tool 1

COMMUNITY ENTRY

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 - Third-party facilitated approach (Service Provider)
 - Door-to-door and Neighbourhood Walkabout
 - Word-of-Mouth
 - Community Events
 - Outreach Activity
- Keep In Mind

At the point of community entry, we are outsiders. As the Community Development Librarian in Regina, I did not live in the North Central community, nor had I ever worked at the local library branch. The community residents did not know me and did not trust me. At times, this made me feel uncomfortable and isolated. It took time and patience to get past this initial feeling. Being an outsider definitely took me out of my comfort zone. I can see it being a stumbling block for many librarians.

- Patti-Lynne McLeod, Community Development Librarian

Definition

Community entry is the process by which library staff enter community spaces intending to meet people where community members are most comfortable. Reaching socially excluded community members means leaving the library and being willing to accept that this might create an initial degree of discomfort and anxiety for library staff.

Rationale

Community entry is the beginning of a community-led approach. If no further relationship building occurs, then it is simply a way to deliver library services to community groups in a traditional library outreach model. As part of a community-led approach, community entry is the first step toward knowing and understanding a community and working collaboratively with them to develop library services. Techniques and strategies for community entry help make it possible to meet and get to know socially excluded community members who are seldom in the library.

Application

There are many community entry techniques and strategies, just as there are many communities. You might need to try several or all of the techniques described in this Tool, as well as your own ideas, depending on factors such as whom you are trying to reach, the geography and culture of the neighbourhood, the relationship of the library in the community, and the amount of time you have.



LIBRARIANS IN THE WORKING TOGETHER PROJECT USED THE FOLLOWING TECHNIQUES AND EACH IS EXPLAINED BELOW.

- Third-Party Facilitated Approach (Service Provider)
- Door-to-door and Neighbourhood Walkabout
- Word-of-Mouth
- Community Events
- Outreach Activity



Technique 1: Third-Party Facilitated Approach (Service Provider)

This approach focuses on identifying and meeting service providers who work with socially excluded people. This can happen in a number of ways, and you can explore these ideas in *Tool 2: Community Mapping*.

The purpose of developing the relationship with the service provider is to eventually meet individual community members who use those services. You may need to meet with service provider coordinators on several occasions in order to build their trust in the library, and their understanding of what could be accomplished, before they offer you opportunities for connecting with their clients.



HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU ARE IN A SERVICE PROVIDER'S SPACE:

- Be clearly identified. Sometimes, community members are hesitant and uncomfortable around strangers, while at other times they will be more eager to talk with a new person than with service provider staff. In either case, name tags are necessary.
- Observe and learn about the relationship between service providers and the community. Some agencies are not well regarded by the community that they are intended to serve. Assess whether you wish to enter the community through this service provider.
- While the goal is to work directly with the community members, it is important to regularly consult and collaborate with the service providers. Ensure that visits and activities do not interfere with agency staff's routine programming or generally hectic times.

- Be clear about wanting to meet the service provider's clients, not just their staff. This is important because sometimes what the service provider wants for their clients is not the same as what their clients want for themselves. For example, one organisation wanted the library to offer Excel courses and was adamant that this was what their clients wanted. When the clients were consulted, they talked about many things they would like from the library, but never mentioned Excel courses.
- Service providers can draw people into the conversation and help make the situation more comfortable for everyone. At the same time, they may influence the interaction you have with community members and you need to be alert to this possibility. For example, at one agency, the manager introduced the Project librarian to a community member because the manager wanted him to access literacy materials. At first, the person was polite but indifferent. But after talking with the librarian, he found out he could get materials for practicing Romanian, his heritage language. Then, he became extremely interested because Romanian was important to him for reconnecting with his father and grandparents. In this case, the service provider had been instrumental in making the all-important first introduction, though it was not initially for the right reasons.



THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES SHOW HOW PROJECT LIBRARIANS CONNECTED WITH THIRD PARTY AGENCIES TO FACILITATE COMMUNITY ENTRY.

have a look



YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE

Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) is a drop-in centre for teens and young adults. The centre provides services such as a resource room, skills training, assistance with finding housing and employment, and other forms of support. The resource room is also a safe place for youth to go if they simply want a place to hang out, which makes it an ideal location to meet community members directly and build relationships. The Working Together Project made the initial contact through several of the staff at BYRC, including the resource room co-ordinator. We stressed the importance of being able to work directly with centre's members and explored the possibility of having weekly hours for one of us to "hang out" and build relationships with the centre's youth. Staff were open to this suggestion and quite willing to schedule regular hours for us to visit.

– Randy Gatley,
Community Development
Librarian

HALFWAY HOUSE

Without the help and support of the representative from John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland (JHS), a support organisation for federal parolees, it would have been impossible to begin to drop in at Guy Richmond Place, one of their halfway houses. At this point, the House was still fairly isolated in the community and both the residents and staff were very cautious about visitors. The JHS representative provided formal introductions to House staff and residents as well as a House tour. She also outlined House protocols and expected behaviours. All this made it possible for me to return regularly to an organisation that would not normally have let me in. This, in turn, let me get to know the residents of the House in the comfort of their kitchen over a cup of coffee and a doughnut.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development
Librarian

VARIETY OF OPPORTUNITIES

The third-party approach differs from group to group. In one organisation, the connection to the community is through a weekly lunch drop-in. This allows an opportunity to talk to people and meet them repeatedly over many months. At another organisation, the librarian who provides computer training drops in for coffee and brings computers with her. This opens the door to developing relationships with the people who hang out there, as well as offering to help people who are interested in learning about computers. At still other organisations, we have received invitations to attend Aboriginal feasts, anniversary celebrations, neighbourhood clean-ups, and special event days. Through participating in a third-party facilitated approach, residents start to see our library as being interested in them and their opinions. From this, relationships and trust develop.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development
Librarian

TARGETED SERVICE PROVIDERS

In Toronto, I targeted certain agencies in order to ensure the opportunity to interact with a wide range of community members. At the Food Bank of the Anglican Ministry, I was able to spend a significant amount of time hanging out before the weekly hampers were given out, chatting and meeting community members. The partnership with the Flemingdon Park School Age and Family Centre allowed me to speak with parents who, for the most part, used the library only for their children, but did not use the library for themselves. Through that third party, I was able to attend parent-child programs that were offered at the Centre and talk with the parents about their library use and the kinds of programs that they would like to see for themselves.

– Sonia Pacheco,
Community Development
Librarian

Technique 2: Door-to-Door and Neighbourhood Walkabout

Going door-to-door means meeting people in their neighbourhoods and introducing yourself to the community. It is an opportunity to initiate discussions about the individual, the library, and the community. This approach begins a dialogue with community members about what they might want in terms of library services and helps staff learn about the lives of community members.

This approach is not about “selling” or promoting existing library services to the community. Rather, it focuses on listening to community members who may not use the library regularly to gather their impressions of library services. These discussions can often shed light on the barriers many people face in accessing library services.



! HERE ARE SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT DOOR-TO-DOOR AS A TECHNIQUE:

- Many people may not be comfortable answering their doors to strangers. You can reduce this anxiety by distributing leaflets in advance that let people know when you will be visiting.
- Staff might not feel comfortable going door-to-door alone. Consider having two staff members or a staff person and a community member go together, or adopt a way that suits the neighbourhood and situation. Remember that too many people approaching the door may be threatening to residents.
- Think about the best time to visit. As you get to know the community, you will become familiar with community events, daily schedules, or days that correspond to religious observances. Plan on going door-to-door when people are most likely to be home, but not engaged in other activities.
- Some people will invite you into their homes. Know in advance what your library’s policy is on this matter and be prepared with a polite and friendly way to accept or decline the invitation. If your library does not have a policy, discuss this ahead of time with a supervisor. At times, it is important to push yourself beyond your comfort zone. In other situations, it is important to trust your instincts.

I choose times to do walkabouts when the children are coming home from school, so there are a lot of people in the streets.

– Mary Saso,
Community
Development
Librarian

- ! TWO WORKING TOGETHER PROJECT SITES USED THIS TECHNIQUE IN THEIR WORK. HERE IS A SNAPSHOT OF THEIR EXPERIENCES:

DOOR-TO-DOOR VISITS

When going door-to-door in the community, I thought that residents would want to know that I represented the library and that my purpose was to get their input about the library. I knew that I would have less than a minute at the doorstep before residents decided whether to continue speaking with me. For the first round, I brought a library survey as a way to get people talking about the library. It helped me to ask people a couple of questions from the survey and to then encourage people to talk about their library experiences. Someone from the Tenant’s Association accompanied me. People knew him, and I felt that the introduction from someone familiar would be helpful. The second time, my pretext for visiting was to offer library cards, to check accounts, and to discuss waiving fines. I visited on my own the second time, as I was a familiar face from the first round and had been seen and involved with residents through community meetings.

- Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKABOUT

Residents in North Central live in houses with front porches that act as a gathering space for residents and neighbours. The streets are quiet and people walk and ride bikes to get around. This makes it easy to connect with them as they are working in their yards, walking home from the store, or visiting their neighbours. I introduce myself and ask their opinion of the library. From there, the conversation begins. The response of residents to my presence has been surprisingly positive. They seem to like the fact that the library has come out to meet them.

- Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

Technique 3: Word-of-Mouth

It is not always possible to reach community members through service agencies or by going door-to-door. In order to meet a broad range of community members, you can ask community members whom you already know for introductions to other community members.

- ! HERE ARE SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT WORD-OF-MOUTH AS A TECHNIQUE:
- Balance the need to respect people’s privacy and the need to contact people. Decide whether to contact someone directly or ask your mutual acquaintance to have that person contact you. You can ask the community members what they think each of their friends or acquaintances would prefer.

- Some parents will use the library for their children, but not for themselves. Staff can use this indirect relationship with the library as a starting point for discussions about what the library can do for them as parents and adults.
- Be deliberate about follow up. It can be easy to lose track of people you have met just once.

With word-of-mouth, a consistent presence is important. Community members may not be able to pass on your contact information, so often the only information they can pass on is the day and time you regularly visit a certain service provider. It's important to make sure you or someone else from the library is there as consistently as possible

- Randy Gatley,
Community Development Librarian



HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH IN THE COMMUNITY:

SPORTS ORGANISER

There is a parent in the community who is active in events and known to other community members. She organises low-cost programs for neighbourhood children and is well known throughout the community for her sports programs. One of the requirements she has is that parents attend their child's activity if the child is under a certain age. This means that there is a group of parents, predominantly immigrant mothers, who gather on a regular basis throughout the summer months to watch their children play sports. I met this organiser at several community meetings and events and asked for her assistance in meeting those parents out watching their children's games. Having such a well-known community member introduce me allowed for an immediate level of comfort and trust between the parents and myself. Using this as a starting point, I began the process of building a relationship with them to find out what programs and services they would like from the library.

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

more word-of-mouth



MEETING REFUGEES

One day at the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, I talked with the janitor and explained that I was from the library and was in the neighbourhood meeting community members. He invited me to come and meet the local Anglican pastor who, he explained, was very active in the area. I met the pastor and it turned out that she hosted a Monday morning Spanish Breakfast for refugees from Central America. I knew, from walking through the district and talking with residents, that a significant Central American refugee community had settled in the neighbourhood over the previous year. It was clear that formal agencies to support this population had not yet been established. In order to meet members of this community, I asked to participate in the Spanish Breakfast as a cook and a server, if necessary. I also asked if the pastor would act as a translator so I could talk with the people who attended and who I would not be able to meet in other locations.

Finding the Spanish Breakfast and having the pastor introduce me and translate for me meant that I had an opportunity to listen to people from a community that was isolated and withdrawn from the larger neighbourhood and whose needs and wants were very different from other socially excluded groups.

– Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Although the word-of-mouth technique is typically meant to be community member to community member, there is a lot of value in word-of-mouth between service providers as well. One of our most active partnerships was accelerated because a staff member at one agency, Guy Richmond Place, was at the same time completing a practicum at a different agency, Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC). He was keen to leave something of lasting value as a “legacy” of his practicum, and he felt strongly that the youth at BYRC could really benefit from the type of work we were doing at Guy Richmond Place. He took the initiative to introduce me to one of the coordinators at BYRC.

In fact, there had previously been some connections between the Working Together Project and BYRC staff, but only at administrative levels. Once I was introduced to the day-to-day staff members who work directly with the youth, our partnership really took off.

– Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian

Once you are able to enter a social network, other networks may appear. People that are involved in community activities may be involved in more than one. For example, in Halifax, we met women who enjoyed doing craft work. They were also involved in the Greystone Tenants’ Association and informally introduced us to many other people in the community we had not previously met.

– Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian

Technique 4: Community Events

Attending community events and meetings in order to introduce yourself and talk with people can be another effective way to enter the community and get to know the residents. This approach, like the others in this Tool, is meant to be the first step in the process of connecting, consulting, building relationships, and then working collaboratively with the community. The focus is on learning about the community, rather than promoting existing library programs and services.

Be selective and strategic about which events you will attend. Sometimes, you may find it difficult to say “no,” as you want to demonstrate that you are actively engaged in the community. Ask yourself, “Am I going to meet the people that I am trying to meet?” Sometimes, the answer will be “no,” and you will recognise that you are meeting service providers and not their clients. For example, fundraising suppers or board meetings are often not a good entry point when trying to meet socially excluded people. Such events tend to involve community members who are already engaged and empowered.

Sometimes, just being visible is enough of a reason to attend an event. You may learn more about the community by observing, and you can ask people more focused questions the next time you see them.



HERE ARE SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT ATTENDING COMMUNITY EVENTS AS A TECHNIQUE:

- People may be surprised to see library staff outside of the library at events and meetings. Be prepared to explain why you are attending and what your role is. This is often a good way to put people at ease and to begin conversations.
- At first, you may be drawn to the familiar idea of working behind a booth or table, but the Project experience is that booths and tables keep as many people away as they draw. A booth or table sets staff up as promoters of library services. It also steers the conversation toward what people think the library would be interested in hearing about, and you might miss opportunities to identify other needs in the community that the library can help address.
- Often, service providers stick together and talk to other service providers. This is comfortable, like hanging out with your colleagues. Remember to seek out individual community members or clients.

to be continued



- Be aware of the protocols and purpose for a meeting or event. For example, you might change the way you initiate conversations if a group is planning a community parade, as opposed to discussing a contentious building project.
- Cultural community events can sometimes include specific rituals or observances, and you might be unsure if you are invited to participate or how to participate. Community members are usually aware that the librarian is not necessarily familiar with their culture. You will probably find that community members do not expect outside participants to “do it the right way,” but are simply pleased if you participate in the event respectfully and with genuine interest. In these situations, it is best to focus on this aspect and not worry about doing something correctly.

Social exclusion means exclusion from the life of the broader “mainstream” community. It does not mean exclusion from community life, and socially excluded communities have a life as rich and varied as that of the “mainstream” community. When we enter a community as learners, community events can be a powerful source for this learning. Attending and participating can be one form of involvement where the community can show us what they value, how they interact, and who they are.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

! THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATE HOW SOME PROJECT LIBRARIANS PARTICIPATED IN A WIDE RANGE OF COMMUNITY EVENTS:

TRADITIONAL FEASTS

At the Aboriginal feasts I attended, the protocol is to sit with members of your gender, take part in the prayers, and wait for the men to come by with the food. People are very welcoming and helpful in explaining different traditions. Some attendees are just learning the traditions themselves.

– Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

WELCOMING CEREMONY

The Native Education College (NEC) in Vancouver holds a welcoming ceremony at the beginning of each term. This event is a chance to become a familiar face and to demonstrate a respect for, and interest in, the protocols and key events of the community. The event includes opportunities to participate in activities such as dancing. Overall, it is a fun, participatory event in which all are invited to be a part of the community. I attend with this in mind and participate accordingly. There is also a segment of the event in which all guests are invited to exit the longhouse through the side doors (NEC is designed as a longhouse), re-enter through the front “ceremonial” door which is only opened for such events and introduce themselves to the longhouse and those present. This element also functions as a way to formally introduce me to NEC and its students. Finally, the event ends with a shared meal, and this provides an opportunity for me to meet students and staff more informally.

- Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

CHURCH SOCIAL

While working in the community, I learned that a significant group of refugees, as well as a large group of working class families, were only connected to the community through the local church. I approached the church administrators and the minister, explained my work in the community, and asked to attend Sunday services and the coffee and cookie social following the services. I approached these visits as I would any other community event and attempted to learn about people’s perceptions of the community and the library. This was another opportunity for me to get to know the community I was working in, particularly those members whom I might not meet through traditional channels.

- Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS

One of the key ways for me to connect with adults living in Thorncliffe Park has been to attend the regularly scheduled school council meetings. This is in part because a significant number of adults living in Thorncliffe Park are parents and because many of them actively participate in the school council meetings. Sometimes, this is the only event, outside of closed social circles, that some community members attend. The average meeting will include 30 parents, with fathers being the predominant parent attending. These meetings are an excellent way for me to listen to community concerns, network with community members, and talk with parents.


- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

reach out




Technique 5: Outreach Activity

This approach involves using a traditional outreach service as a way to enter the community. Be very cautious with this approach: it tends to establish the librarian as the expert or teacher and the community member as the learner or student. This dynamic can set the tone for future encounters, making it difficult to establish relationships that are equal, forthright, and based on a collaborative approach to meeting community needs. The advantage of this approach is that librarians, service providers, and community members are familiar with it and a certain comfort level is readily established. In some cases, it may be the only opportunity to make connections because communities have come to expect this approach from libraries.

 **HERE ARE SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN THINKING ABOUT USING OUTREACH AS A TECHNIQUE:**

- Traditional outreach activities involve information going from the library to the community. Staff can modify traditional outreach activities to create dialogue and conversation so that the library is also receiving information. For example, one way to conduct a tour is to turn the tour around and ask attendees to tour you through the branch and tell you what they see.
- If someone first asks for a pre-packaged or traditional program, you may be able to convince them to let you visit or do something else. Service providers may ask for outreach style programs because they think that is all libraries can do. Sometimes, further discussion can result in a modified outreach program with a plan to get to know and collaborate with the people that use the service provider.
- Always remember why you agreed to provide an outreach activity in the first place—as a means to an end. The end is your opportunity to meet and talk with community members.



Staff as authoritative service provider and resident as recipient and learner is a difficult dynamic to shift once it is reinforced through outreach. When working with socially excluded people, staff must try to immediately position themselves as learners and the community as experts. Staff act as facilitators, supporting and collaborating with the community.

– Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator



go further



IN THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES, NOTICE HOW PROJECT LIBRARIANS HELPED THE INITIAL OUTREACH ACTIVITY EVOLVE INTO A COMMUNITY-LED ACTIVITY:

COMPUTER TRAINING

I facilitated computer training using the library's online employment resources at the request of a community agency in Thorncliffe Park. The computer training did not allow for participant direction or feedback as it was part of a pre-set in-house employment program and, as such, would be classified as traditional outreach work. This agency has strong roots in the community, is highly regarded by the vast majority of community members, and considers itself the lead agency in the community. By honouring the request for the computer training, this outreach activity allowed me to build credibility and trust with the organisation. Once the credibility and trust had been built, I was then able to connect directly with its clients (not necessarily the computer learners). I could then build relationships with individuals and begin to learn directly from them about what they hoped to accomplish.

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

LIBRARY TOURS

In Regina, I invite groups to come to the library for lunch, a tour, and a focus group. These events are arranged through the service provider. We send out an invitation to the group explaining what will take place. When community members arrive, they receive new library cards and we begin with a meal and conversation. Then, the branch librarian talks to them about the history of the library and the programs that they have developed based on ideas from groups like theirs. She takes them on a tour and explains how to find material and how to use the website.

Then, time is set aside for them to give their input, turning an outreach activity into a chance to consult the community. We ask participants for their opinions on programs, services, barriers, advertising, library participation in the past, what they like best about the library, what they like least, and how the library could attract more people.

- Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

food for thought



Keep In Mind

Taking on any new activity will always include challenges. Not all library staff will face the same challenges and certainly new ones will be encountered. Below are some of the main challenges identified by the Project librarians upon first entering their communities. The purpose of the list is to support staff who are new to community work and who want to reflect on the best possible ways to understand and connect with their communities.

- **Self awareness:** Be sensitive to how you may appear to socially excluded community members. Words and actions might be misunderstood or have a more profound impact than intended.
- **Surrendering expertise:** For many librarians, this will be the first time they enter into the community's space as learners and not as experts. In outreach scenarios, staff are always positioned as the expert or authority. Becoming the learner is the challenge. Be watchful that you do not revert to the familiar outreach and service paradigm.
- **Personal comfort level:** Often, staff are leaving their familiar environment to enter one that is unknown. While initial staff discomfort is to be expected, it should be considered secondary to the ongoing discomfort many socially excluded community members face when interacting with the library and library staff.
- **Networking:** This is new and challenging work and it is helpful to identify other people who are doing the same or similar work. This is not always possible within one library system and might require connecting with other library systems for support.
- **Community expectations:** The community may have preconceived expectations of library staff and outreach services. Knowing this will help library staff explain the purpose of their visits and the nature of their work in the community.
- **Personal biases:** A library staff member's personal biases can influence perceptions of the community and can make it difficult to hear what community members are saying about their needs and wants. Identifying personal biases helps to separate what the librarian thinks about community needs from what community members think about their needs.
- **Listen first:** At this stage, the focus is on listening to people describe themselves and the community. The more staff listen, the better able they will be to work with communities to develop programs and services that meet the community's needs.
- **Diverse cultural views of the library:** When entering culturally diverse communities, library staff meet people who may have a different notion of library service or have no experience at all with public libraries. It can be difficult to talk about the role of the library in the community. Provide explanations in plain language.
- **Institutional discrimination:** Many socially excluded people have had negative experiences with institutions such as schools, police forces, healthcare systems, and government agencies. Such experiences may impact a person's willingness and ability to trust the library, another institution.
- **Library experience:** Many people have had negative experiences in the library and with library staff. For detailed information, see the discussion on *Systemic Barriers* earlier in this section.

...it's starting to come together

- **Cultural protocols:** Be aware of and willing to learn about the cultures of the communities you are working in. Protocols, norms, values, customs, and beliefs are all significant things to understand. It is important to learn these things directly from the community rather than from preconceived and perhaps inaccurate notions.
- **Literacy:** Some socially excluded people will have low literacy skills, while others will be highly educated with a broad range of skills. Take care not to confuse low literacy with ESL.
- **Language:** When working with some socially excluded groups, speaking only English may be a barrier. Consider asking other community members, library staff members, or service providers for help translating.
- **Library jargon:** Avoid jargon and use plain English when speaking about the library. Jargon separates us from the community, while plain language links us to the community making us accessible and approachable. Common examples of library jargon include "YA," "circulation," and "claims returned."
- **Value of library service:** Library staff cannot assume that all community members value the public library. Most Project librarians were surprised by the apathy and sometimes distaste that some community members felt toward the library. Understanding how these feelings and opinions evolved provides insight to the barriers that keep people from using the library.
- **Be flexible:** Assess and adapt to the situation, the environment, or the community. For example, when wishing to leave contact information, consider if a business card is too official. Perhaps a post-it note is more appropriate.
- **Community mapping:** As described in *Tool 2: Community Mapping*, this activity is both a Tool in itself and an excellent community entry technique. Consider the ways that community mapping activities can overlap with and enhance your community entry and apply the two Tools together.
- **Keep Trying:** Library staff may try an entry strategy that does not work at that time. They will need to try again, perhaps in a different way, time, or place. Learn something from each attempt.



right this way



Tool 2

COMMUNITY MAPPING

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 - Community Asset Mapping
 - Social Mapping
- Keep In Mind

I walked to every service provider within a two km radius of Greystone in my first few months on the job. I learned what it felt like to leave the familiar neighbourhood, go out into the broader community, find service organisations, walk through the door, and speak to staff. It was eye opening to walk a kilometre in the rain and arrive at an agency, only to find a sign tacked to the door saying "Back at 2 p.m." or even to find that an agency had permanently closed without notice.

- Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

Definition

Community mapping is a technique that is used to gather information about a community. The mapping process answers a broad range of questions. Who lives, works, or visits around here? Where do people go? What do they identify as the best places to shop for groceries, stop for coffee, check a bulletin board, or relax in a park? Are there different “best places” for youth, families, seniors, or specific ethnic or economic groups? What types of services and resources are available in the community? What kinds of places or activities do people feel are missing from the community?

The information gathered can be used by the library to better understand how and where to work within the community. As well as yielding a detailed picture of a community, the process of mapping provides valuable opportunity for meeting and enhancing relationships with community members and service providers.

There are two key differences between community mapping and simply creating a community directory. First, community mapping goes beyond basic directory information to create a rich, qualitative profile of the community, one that asks questions about a community’s needs, aspirations, assets, and challenges. The second is that this information must be gathered in the community and from the community. Active community participation is a key component of community mapping.

***it's always
changing...***

Rationale

Public libraries have always gathered information about their communities. They use a range of sources such as statistical profiles, community reports, local papers, patrons in the branches, and service providers in the community. Libraries also analyse their member databases, conduct surveys, and attend community events.

These traditional sources and methods of data gathering are important and useful, but can exclude significant portions of a community. Consider these points:

- Statistical profiles focus on the individuals and families living in a community. They exclude those who live elsewhere but work, shop, use services, meet friends or groups, hang out, or otherwise contribute to life in the community.
- Library member databases only allow libraries to understand those who have library cards.
- In-house library surveys tell libraries only about those people who come into their facilities.
- Libraries form relationships with their existing regular patrons and learn to understand their needs. Libraries need to ensure they do not use this understanding to make assumptions about the needs and interests of other people who do not use the library.
- Telephone surveys only reach those who can afford telephone service and whose lives are stable enough to maintain regular phone service over a period of time.
- Mobile phones are not usually included in telephone surveys.
- Information gathered from staff or service providers who know the community might be reliable, but staff perspectives will not capture the full range of the community’s own perceptions and definitions of itself.

Traditional approaches do not always involve communities in a meaningful way. Community mapping ensures that it is the community's own vision that informs the library's understanding of the community it serves.

Application

You can conduct community mapping activities in a number of different ways. Your initial approach might involve creating an inventory of social agencies and the kinds of services they offer. A more in-depth process could use informal conversations and hand-drawn maps to capture multiple profiles of a community. Your approach will vary depending on the type of information you need and your current knowledge, experience, and relationships within the community.

In most communities, organisations come and go, and an asset map can slip out of date quickly. This speaks to the importance of library staff being continually active and maintaining a presence in the community. I have found that making the time to regularly walk out in the community, check in with old contacts, and identify potential new ones has been invaluable to keeping the asset map up-to-date and the work of the Project active.

– Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian



WORKING TOGETHER PROJECT LIBRARIANS EXPERIMENTED WITH TWO APPROACHES:

community asset mapping: community asset mapping focuses on learning about the organised or formal groups in a community. It helps you learn about the services provided in the community and identify potential community partners, providing a launch pad for you to enter the community.

social mapping: social mapping focuses on the informal social assets in the community. Informal assets could be anything from a person identified as a community leader, to a street corner or park, where community members congregate, to a café, where a group meets regularly to discuss local events and issues.

With creativity and flexibility, either of these two approaches can be adapted to suit any community.

lets move on



Technique 1: Community Asset Mapping

For the purposes of community mapping, formal assets have one or more established structures, such as a name, physical space, staff members, or non-profit status. What are the formal assets that help to strengthen your target community? The “map” itself can take any physical form that makes sense to you. It could be a list, spreadsheet, diagram, or an actual map with space for annotations. Be sure your community asset map does not merely replicate existing community directories: allow the process go beyond such directories and initiate relationships, document community needs, and explore ways in which libraries can work with their communities.

! HERE ARE SOME BASIC STEPS FOR DEVELOPING THE MAP:

1. Define the service area and target audience.

Understand your library’s geographical boundaries, remembering that your target community may not recognise the same boundaries. It may be useful to collaborate with other branches or library systems.

2. Take a walk.

- Spend time walking about the community in order to experience it directly. This also helps you to become accessible in the community. In some cases, where walking is not possible for you, choose the mode of transportation that makes you most accessible and will allow you to take note of things that are new to you (e.g., bus or bicycle).
- You can use community directories to generate a shortlist of organisations to contact first. This will give you a helpful starting point, but is not a replacement for walking about the community. Only by working directly in the community will you find organisations not listed in directories and develop an understanding of the community that no directory can convey.
- Ask for tips and referrals from people you meet.

3. Decide on an approach strategy. Calling organisations first to set up an appointment works best in some communities. Sometimes dropping by in person will be more successful. Determine what will work best in your community. You may only learn this through trial and error so do not be discouraged if initial attempts are awkward or unsuccessful.



In my experience, it was essential to leave the library, walk the community, and introduce myself in person to community service agencies. By standing in another agency’s space, I was giving up the power and control that my own space, the library, usually conferred on me. When I abandoned my “power base,” or comfort zone, community agencies responded to me as a community equal rather than as a representative of a large community institution. Being received as an equal, and not as an authority or expert, greatly increased my chances of engaging community agencies and members in discussions that critically assessed library services and revealed people’s needs and wants.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development Librarian

4. Document your learning. Decide how to store the information collected. You want to create a document that goes beyond basic directory information to more qualitative information. Remember that this is a living document, which you will need to update regularly.

5. Avoid library outreach. Learn about the organisation and what is important to its staff and members. Focus on the organisation, not on the library.

6. Make contact with community members as soon as possible. Identify ways to interact directly with community members. Look for ways to move beyond initial meetings with service providers to meet with community members themselves.



HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A COMMUNITY ASSET MAP ENTRY FROM ONE OF THE PROJECT SITES.

ID	15		Non-Profit Organization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Agency	Community Services Agency		Interview Date	01-02-03	
Address	123 Main Street	City	Sample City	Postal Code	A1B 2C3
Phone Number	(123) 456-7890	Fax Number	(123) 456-7891		
First Name	Jane	Last Name	Doe		
Title	Acting Executive Director	Email Address			
Primary Services	<p>Funded by M. of Health Help with in-home health care Help with in-school health care Arrange admission for persons who require residence in a long-term care facility Provide information and referral, and access to individualized, community-based health and support services. Identify and monitor the needs of clients and the community.</p>				
Library Perception	<p>In a meeting with the Acting Director and 2 other staff members, it was suggested that the Anybranch Library is not well know to the Community. The Library does not have high visibility. (It is located in a community centre - more residents know about the community centre then the library.) Library signage should be improved. The Library does not have enough ML materials, and the existing materials are 'hidden' at the back of the library, with no signage. Additionally, it was felt that the Library is not welcoming to the immigrant community because there is no signage in other languages and because library staff are not multilingual. A final comment was that the Library should have a lounge area, where local residents can come, sit, and read ML magazines and newspapers. There is currently no sitting area in the Library (as exists atbookstores).</p>				
Program Suggestions	<p>Staff spoke of the lack of computers in the community. Many highly educated immigrants have good computer skills, but do not have easy access to computers. Community members would benefit from resume preparation skills development. Women-only computer courses would be well received. The Mall would be a good place to promote the Library and/or to hold programs and services, as it is the heart of the community.</p>				
Possible Partnerships	<p>CSA has a large meeting room, which could be used to co-host computer training. CSA was very receptive to this project and is very willing to consider developing partnerships with the Library to help the community.</p>				

! THE NEXT EXAMPLE DESCRIBES ONE LIBRARIAN’S ASSET MAPPING EXPERIENCE:

COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING

Community asset mapping was one of the very first activities I undertook after an orientation to the library system and the branch. The branch that the Working Together Project was based out of had a published community directory listing 140 agencies located in, or serving, the local area. I used this as a starting point and selected 25 agencies to visit, based on their proximity to the Greystone community and their involvement with Greystone’s residents.

The community asset map compiled out of this process identified areas in which services met community needs, such as food banks and recreation facilities, and areas in which more services were needed, such as childcare and culturally based programming. In addition to finding out about the services, staffing and funding of each group, I asked about each group’s prior library involvement and suggestions for library services, and then investigated partnership opportunities. The map also detailed the existing library services that the organisations used most and least. Community asset mapping was a useful technique for introducing me to the community and for gathering input that can help the library branch plan future services.

- Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

Technique 2: Social Mapping

Informal assets are those elements that communities develop or choose for themselves to meet their needs, but that do not have a formal structure. You may not find many of these informal spaces or groups during the formal community asset mapping process, but you will discover them with social mapping. This process is not as straightforward as mapping the service providers, but it is a valuable exercise for understanding a community and the library’s role within it. You will find that social mapping works best after the point of community entry, when you are better known and have a better understanding of the community.

Involving the community in the social mapping activity is essential because community members are the only ones who really know the informal assets. Let the community take the lead as much as possible and position yourself as facilitator. Your ultimate goal is to give community members the opportunity to show the library their community.

There is no single set of instructions for you to follow. The Project librarians who used this technique each approached it quite differently. The examples on the following pages illustrate the processes they used and will give you ideas that you can build upon to suit your local context.



HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CREATING YOUR OWN SOCIAL MAPPING PROCESS:

- **Is social mapping the right approach?** Social mapping takes time, resources, and the will to approach groups and individuals outside of the relative comfort of community organisations. It also calls for the resources and institutional commitment to follow through with the results. Is your library able to commit the staff and resources to visit the community locations or work with the community groups identified?
- **What does your library want to learn?** Do you want to get a broad understanding of the whole community or are you focusing on a specific issue or group? These factors will influence who you approach and how the exercise is framed. There may be many social maps because different community groups and individuals may have differing visions of the community. If you want to learn about how a community interacts with a specific issue, such as childcare or literacy, the focus of the mapping activity and the questions you ask may be different.
- **What kind of “map?”** A social map is not necessarily a geographical map. Libraries are often constrained by geographical catchment areas, but individuals’ sense of their community rarely is. Presenting an individual with a map of the branch’s catchment might be unnecessarily limiting. For example, many community members may have to travel far outside the community to meet certain needs because nothing of that nature exists locally.
 - You may decide not to use a geographical map at all. Participants may not be comfortable with map reading, so it may be more revealing to map in terms such as proximity or importance.
 - If you do choose a geographical map, try to find one that is very basic—one without a lot of unnecessary information on it. This might mean drawing the map yourself.
 - Consider using photos on the map to give people a sense of landmarks. This can help give people a frame of reference if they are uncomfortable with maps.
 - Give people the option of drawing out the map themselves. This can tell you a lot about what people value (and do not) in the community.
 - Some people may prefer to discuss their community verbally rather than in writing, leaving you to map out the information they are sharing.
- **How do you ask the questions?** Encourage participants to explore their own conception of their community, rather than what they think you might want to hear or what they think “community” might formally mean. Stressing that this is an exercise to find out what is important to them will help you do this.
 - You can usually ask probing questions while a person is mapping. For example, asking why they like a particular coffee shop may help you identify what they value. Is it low-cost coffee, non-judgemental service, or a comfortable place to sit? Of course, this information is valuable, but it can only tell you so much. Just because a person likes low-cost coffee does not mean he or she has a low income. This information is a good starting point, but you will need to follow up with additional needs identification.
 - Remember to watch non-verbal cues that will tell you if you are asking too many questions or if the questions are too personal.

on the map



HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL MAP CREATED AT ONE OF THE PROJECT SITES.

PUT YOUR MOUNT PLEASANT ON THE MAP!

Help your library better understand its community

Use this map to mark the places, people, things and events that are most important to you in Mount Pleasant. These could be anything:

a person ... a shop ... a drop-in centre ... a street corner ... a park ... a friend's home ... a support group ... a safe place ... a regular meeting ... an event ... a place of worship ... a restaurant ... a regular coffee date ... anything!

On your map, try to show approximately where each thing is located. If you want, write something describing it, and explaining why it's important to you.

What's missing in Mount Pleasant?



THE NEXT TWO EXAMPLES GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK DEPENDING ON YOUR COMMUNITY.

SOCIAL ASSET MAPPING WITH A GROUP

Our community asset mapping exercise revealed a lack of services in the Working Together Project's chosen neighbourhoods and I had a particular interest in mapping the social assets of newcomers and immigrants in these areas. This process involved both a mapping exercise and the following series of questions for group discussion:

- *Where do immigrants and refugees go to meet and talk with each other?*
- *What kinds of places do they visit?*
- *Why do they choose these places?*
- *Which officials do immigrants and refugees turn to when they need assistance? By this I meant a person who carries a title and is in a position of power such as an Imam, building superintendent, or politician.*
- *Who is a catalyst in the community? By this I meant a person who gets things done but does not necessarily carry a title.*
- *Who are the connectors in the community? By this I meant people who are active in the community but do not necessarily get things done.*

Community members who participated were keen to answer the questions about places, but demonstrated some reluctance when answering questions about community leaders. It's possible they felt these questions were too personal.

These questions formed the basis for me to have initial interactions with community members, not only to identify their places and some community leaders, but also to talk with new community members in the identified places.

I also created a large-scale map of the two communities that showed streets, shops, parks, and so on. I showed it to groups I met and asked them to point out and describe where they gathered with other people. The map was simply a tool to get residents talking about their community. They offered numerous suggestions for places someone might come into contact with members of her community, ranging from the local McDonald's to the weekly vegetable vendor's truck.

– Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

check it out



SOCIAL ASSET MAPPING WITH INDIVIDUALS

I focused most on approaching new groups and individuals, primarily at community gathering places and events. Because this involved contact with individuals in passing, rather than in the context of events organised specifically for mapping, the approach was necessarily a much simpler one. Usually, I set up a table in some public space, such as a mall or a community fair, provided participants with a simple map of the community, and asked people to:

- *“Use this map to mark the places, people, things, and events that are most important to you in Mount Pleasant. These could be anything:*
- *a person ... a shop ... a drop-in centre ... a street corner ... a park ... a friend’s home ... a support group ... a safe place ... a regular meeting ... an event ... a place of worship ... a restaurant ... a regular coffee date ... anything!*
- *On your map, try to show approximately where each thing is located. If you want, write something describing it, and explaining why it’s important to you.”*

I then followed up with:

- *“What’s missing in Mount Pleasant?”*

Usually, I displayed a reference map to assist participants who experienced difficulty with map reading. This consisted of a larger scale version of the same map that the participants used, with photos of major intersections to aid in identification. I also offered participants several alternatives, such as drawing their own map, or doing the exercise verbally.

This approach was successful in some areas, particularly as a means of coming into one-to-one contact with individuals in the community. The fact that it was conducted in passing meant that the extent of the mapping was somewhat limited. Anyone engaging in this approach will also want to explore opportunities to conduct social mapping in group settings where the group comes together for the express purpose of mapping, and participants have time to provide greater detail.

- Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Keep in Mind

- Community mapping is an ongoing process, not a one-time event in the beginning stages of working in a community. Your living document will be updated as you meet other people and learn more about their activities.
- At first, mapping is valuable as a community entry method. It provides an initial profile of the community, as well as ideas of where you might begin working with the community. Later, mapping can act as a spur to ongoing work by allowing you to either delve into the community in greater depth or approach it from a different angle.
- The product you create is less important than what you and your library do with it. Your overall goal is to have the library’s vision of the community align as closely as possible with the community’s vision of itself.
- A benefit of mapping is that both you and your library gain a better understanding of your community. This benefit is only realised once you begin using this understanding to create library services that better reflect the community.
- Always be aware of and abide by requirements regarding retention of personal information and protection of privacy. Some information you hear may not be appropriate to record or keep.



Tool 3

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 - Hanging Out
 - Group Discussions
 - Attending Regular Meetings and Events
- Keep In Mind

Relationship building is central to collaborative needs identification and service planning. It is an ongoing process that needs to be incorporated in every part of the library's engagement with the community. Relationship building is not a one-time thing, not a step to take and then move on. When you are working with socially excluded communities in particular, relationship building forms the basis of every part of library service.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Definition

Relationship building is the foundation of the Community-Led Service Planning Model. It involves building trust with socially excluded community members and learning how to engage them respectfully in dialogue about themselves, their needs, their community, and the library. Building relationships forges the link between the community and the library.

Relationship building with socially excluded community members can only happen when library staff leave the building and introduce themselves in neighbourhood spaces that are familiar and comfortable to the community members. Being in community spaces establishes the library's intention and commitment to seek out the concerns of people who are often unheard in and feel isolated from the traditional library. You can find more information about how to make initial connections in *Tool 1: Community Entry* and *Tool 2: Community Mapping*.

Rationale

Many staff may believe “I’m a librarian, so I should just work in a library” or “we can’t make people use the library if they don’t want to.” Those are natural responses based on how we are accustomed to working. But as soon as we acknowledge that many people are isolated from and unserved by the public library, we must reconsider both our role and our strategies.

There are a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that influence socially excluded people’s ability and desire to participate in mainstream society. Many socially excluded community members have had negative experiences with public institutions, including the library, which affect their willingness to engage the services available to them. Establishing and building relationships with community members is the means to develop a rapport with people who would not normally interact with the library or library staff. Relationships become the means to connect the library and its services to people who are wary of social institutions and bureaucracies. Relationships with community members allow libraries to understand how the library is perceived by the community, find out what library services the community needs, and determine the most effective ways to deliver the services.

By acting as a conduit, facilitator, and representative, the librarian working in the community becomes the human face of the library.

Application

Librarians in the Working Together Project developed and used three key techniques to help them in the community: hanging out, group discussions, and attending meetings and events. If you have never built relationships with the community in this way before, you may want to start by using one of these techniques. Once you are more comfortable with the work, be creative and develop your own techniques. Share what you learn with your colleagues so that you can each build on each other’s work.

Technique 1: Hanging Out

Every Project librarian relied upon hanging out. This technique involves regularly visiting a community space to meet and talk with people. Despite the casual term, there is more to hanging out than simply showing up. The immediate purpose of hanging out is to have conversations with people about themselves, their lives, their community, and their experiences or perceptions of the library. The long-term purpose is to allow these casual meetings and conversations to evolve into ongoing, respectful relationships.

Hanging out gives community members the choice to participate or not participate in a conversation. The freedom of this approach allows both staff and community members to discuss a broad range of topics that might otherwise be restricted in a more formal setting, such as a focus group or classroom.

Though the concept of hanging out is simple, its practice is not always easy at first. To help you become more comfortable with hanging out, the discussion and examples below include suggestions on where to go, what to do and what to talk about, and the role of the librarian.



WHERE TO GO

Relationship building occurs in places where community members feel most comfortable. This can often be in a service provider's common room or activity room. Service providers have many forms and names. Your community may have a family place, neighbourhood house, short-term housing shelter, women's resource centre, youth services program, mental health service provider, community kitchen, immigrant and refugee service agency, food bank, senior's centre, community health place, or adult basic education program.

Also remember to look for gathering places other than service providers' spaces, since many socially excluded community members may not be connected to any service provider. Other gathering places can include the recreation room in a public housing complex, a park, a church, a coffee shop, or spaces used by members of specific ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

The community mapping process, as described in *Tool 2: Community Mapping*, can help you identify where else to meet and talk with members of the community.



WHAT TO DO AND WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

I remember the first time I brought food to the area shelter. I had arranged to meet with people in the community room. I had hoped to meet people who were regular users of the shelter and perhaps get a chance to talk to them. I had some experience bringing food to this type of drop in and knew that, if I sat near the food, I would have a chance to talk with more people. I brought my favourite: Dad's Oatmeal cookies. Over the course of that first afternoon, I watched as people took the cookies but had great difficulties chewing them. The cookies were hard, and many people were missing teeth or had dental problems. After this, I always brought scones to the shelter and other places where I was meeting people for the first time.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development Librarian

Tool 3 – Relationship Building

What exactly should you do when you show up at a place to hang out? How do you break the ice? Do you wade in or jump in? This will vary significantly from community to community and you will need to take your cue from the people and places themselves. For example, the games room at a street youth drop-in centre will involve a different manner of interacting than the coffee room at a refugee settlement agency. Here are some ideas you can consider depending on your community:

- Food is always appreciated. People are often relaxed and social when they eat together.
- Bring things such as clay, laptops, and origami for conversation starters, as people can be more at ease when they have something to do with their hands.
- Bring books that relate directly to an activity. For example, bringing cookbooks to a community kitchen can be a conversation starter. In general, be selective about whether or where you bring books, so you do not immediately become labelled or associated only with books.
- Be alert for opportunities to join such things as a smudging ceremony, card game, coffee break, meal, or group conversation.
- Pick up a community newsletter or paper and browse through it for conversation starters of local interest.
- Ask service agency staff members for ideas for connecting with people who use their agency. The staff members may also have ideas for connecting with others in the community who are not their clients.
- Initiate conversations. People will let you know if they do not feel like talking.
- Be direct when speaking with people and focus on what is happening close at hand. For example, you can ask a literacy student, “What skills are you working on?”

Many productive conversations took place on the back porch where the guys at the halfway house had to go if they wanted a smoke. They were more relaxed—no eye contact required—than if they were sitting across from me at the table.

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

I wasn't interested in talking about myself at all. It was more important to me to get people to talk about themselves. I'd ask a question in response to a question. This was a more comfortable approach for me, as it let me keep the focus of the conversation on the community member.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community
Development
Librarian



ROLE OF THE LIBRARIAN

When I first started meeting people in their spaces, I was unprepared for the level of poverty that so many people experienced and lived in. It is one thing to know the income level considered to be below the poverty line, and another thing to see, smell and hear the effects of poverty on people's lives. At one organisation, I was invited to the evening meal—spaghetti with fruit juice...all that was left of their food supplies. During the summer at another organisation, all the Kool-Aid was diluted to half strength because so many people were coming in for an afternoon drink that the organisation couldn't afford extra packages of Kool-Aid. While there are many examples of poverty in our communities, the point for me, as I started to work in the community, was to understand my role in the community and not be overwhelmed by situations I couldn't immediately change. It was also important for me not to let myself become calloused to the level of poverty in my community. I had to let the experience of other people's poverty make me more determined to do what I could, as best I could, in the context of the work I was doing. In this case, it was to find ways to talk with community members so that libraries could change to become more accessible, relevant, and helpful in their lives.

– Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

As with all aspects of hanging out, your role as a librarian is simple, but not necessarily easy to fit into when you first begin. You will be without the familiar supports of your circulation staff, Internet connections, agenda, and information desk. Although you are an expert on your library system, you are not an expert on the community members' needs. They are. You are hanging out with them to build relationships so that they will eventually feel comfortable sharing that information with you and—much later—working with you to develop ways that the library can provide more equitable library services to them.

Let the community members take the lead while remaining clear about why you are there. Although you will have a friendly and approachable manner, you are not there to make personal friendships, but rather to represent and offer a personal connection to the public library.

- Wear your name tag. Some community members will not be able to tell the difference between library staff and other service provider staff. Your visible identification helps clarify your role in the community.
- Allow time to build and nurture a relationship with staff in community organisations. They may need to develop trust in library staff before they are willing to let you hang out in their space.
- Remember to discuss with staff your reasons for being in a service provider's space. Find out what protocols might apply to you, such as which areas or activities are "service provider staff only" or "members only."

hang out here too



Tool 3 – Relationship Building

- Ask what each service provider requires from you. Some service providers will be comfortable with an informal approach. Others may need you to sign in and out at each visit. A few may require one of their own staff to be present or nearby when you are with clients, which may affect how the community members perceive your role. Be forthright about clarifying your role as often as you need to.
- Involve service provider staff in your efforts to learn about the needs of the community. The staff may sometimes be just as new to the library's resources as the community members you are trying to reach through them.
- Be sensitive to the economic, social, and cultural circumstances of the community. But do not try to create the impression you are from the same background if you are not.
- Accommodate the challenges presented when there is staff turnover among service providers and within your own library system. When the change is with library staff, make a special effort to personally introduce the new library worker to service providers and community members with whom you have developed relationships.



At the halfway house for men on parole, new residents arrived frequently. Sometimes a resident who already knew me would assure a newcomer, "It's OK to talk to her, she's not one of the POs [parole officers]."

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

It was very helpful for me to keep a notebook to document stories. I would use it after hanging out at a community organisation or event. This helped me depersonalise some of the stories I heard and made it possible to assess situations critically rather than emotionally.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development Librarian



THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES FROM THE PROJECT LIBRARIANS WILL GIVE YOU SOME IDEA OF THE VARIOUS WAYS THAT HANGING OUT IN THE COMMUNITY CAN LEAD TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS. NOTICE HOW BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS TAKES TIME, BUT IS A PREREQUISITE FOR A LATER LINK TO EQUITABLE LIBRARY SERVICE.

be patient...

FOOD BANK

I regularly visit the Food Bank that is run the by Flemington Park Anglican Ministry and hang out in their space before the weekly hampers are picked up. By being at the Food Bank on a regular basis and speaking to the clients about casual topics, many clients are comfortable with me and know that I work for the library.

A ministry volunteer and Food Bank user spoke with me casually over a two year period. Only after this length of time did the person feel comfortable enough with me to ask for assistance finding library books on a medical matter. Although the person had a library card, they had not visited the library in quite some time and did not feel comfortable asking a complete stranger for information on the medical matter.

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

MORNING COFFEE GROUP

Once a week, I visit Circle of Life for morning coffee and their short prayer meeting. I bring a few laptops and set them up on the coffee table for anyone that would like to use them. This is a small centre, with perhaps five to ten people coming and going. There is a lot of good-natured kidding around. These visits are a good way to find out about the community, as there is a lot of sharing of information about people and events.

- Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian



COMMUNITY KITCHEN

A colleague and I went to the local community kitchen at St. Paul's Church. While it took time to get to know many of the people who visited the community kitchen, they were very friendly and eventually we were very comfortable together.

- Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

take some time



HALFWAY HOUSE

At Guy Richmond Place, a halfway house for men on federal parole, hanging out never evolved into a specific pattern. Flexibility was essential. It was important to remember that, for me, going to the house was a place of work, whereas for the men it was their home. Sometimes residents were having breakfast, reading the paper, or watching TV. Others had calls to make and appointments to attend. Some days, I spent a lot of time demonstrating the computer keyboard or signing people up for library cards. Other days involved eating pancakes, chatting about newspaper headlines and baseball, or answering library-related questions by cell phone. The variety was incredible.

These regular visits to their home allowed some residents to develop their computer skills over time without them having think they were “learning computers.” Eventually, I became such a fixture of the house that several of the men who had originally been indifferent or resistant to the library and computers asked if they could meet me at the branch for further instruction.

– Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian

YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE

Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) in Vancouver has a resource room that is designed specifically for members to hang out and access services. I visited the resource room once a week to hang out and meet the centre’s youth. I arrived and sat around the coffee table in the common area, wearing ID that identified me by name and as being from the library. I introduced myself to the youth and explained who I was and why I was at BYRC. Over time, many of the centre’s youth became comfortable with me and began to trust me. This led to much informal discussion. We talked about their needs for library service and about them participating in other Project activities, such as informal focus groups and advisory group meetings. The youth became comfortable asking for materials on specific subjects. For example, the centre’s youth were interested in Tarot. I brought Tarot cards and supplementary materials from the library. Many of the youth had their readings done by a centre worker or tried to learn how to do readings themselves.

These experiences carry several implications in terms of library services. The goal of working with a community is not necessarily to have those community members become in-person users of the library. Many of the youth appreciated having me there and participated in the Project activities, but continued to be uninterested in visiting the library. This could be for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, this had to do with the level of comfort and convenience BYRC provides. For many of the youth it is easier and more comfortable to access library services at BYRC. Sometimes there is no more effective way to remove cultural barriers to access than by meeting community members in the places that are their’s.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Members at Coast Mental Health would sometimes wait several days or even weeks to ask me a question, rather than ask their own counsellors or visit the branch library across the street. For a few members, our ongoing comfortable relationship was much more important than immediate service.

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community
Development
Librarian

Technique 2: Group Discussions

In this technique, library staff participate in group discussions with community members in a community setting. You may be involved in organising the time, place, and perhaps the facilitation of the discussion, or community participants may do this. Often, a discussion may occur spontaneously with no planning or facilitation at all.

The purpose of group discussions is twofold. First, you need to hear the issues, concerns, and needs of the community as voiced by the community. Second, the technique can be a way for you to meet new people and begin to develop relationships with them or enhance existing relationships you may already have with some participants.

A group discussion creates a comfortable environment for people who feel more at ease talking in a group than they do talking to an individual. In one-to-one conversations, some people may hold back from mentioning an idea, but once they hear someone else bring it up in a group discussion, they may have a lot to say about it. People in groups may generate many additional ideas based on thoughts they just heard from other participants.

Group discussions are more likely to be fruitful once you have already established some rapport within a community. Otherwise, you may find that people only tell you what they think you want to hear. Project librarians noticed this frequently when they were first getting to know people. It was not until community members began to trust the librarian that they discussed what they really thought, particularly about the library and any negative experiences they may have had with it.

Hearing what the community has to say means you sometimes hear about things that are well beyond what the library is capable of addressing. Project librarians heard requests for free dental service, a safe injection site, access to parole officers, and a smoking room. They also heard suggestions that librarians dress in 'gangsta' wear and that libraries should advertise on buses and television. Before you respond automatically that the library cannot do these things, consider what these requests might reveal. The individual asking for access to a parole officer at the branch, for example, might be pointing out that he has very limited free time and cannot fit in a visit to the library when he is required to use that time to visit his parole officer. In such a case, would extended branch hours partly meet his need?

During an informal discussion with a young parents group, some parents said that they took their children to story times and puppet shows, when it was clear that they hadn't attended any. Further discussions revealed that they did not know what to expect at a story time, or they had outdated ideas about what was done at a story time. My assumption was that they probably thought that saying they took their children to storytimes made them sound like good parents to their peers, and perhaps they thought that that's what I wanted to hear.

- Darla Muzzerall,
Community
Development Librarian


keep reading



 THE FOLLOWING POINTS MIGHT ALSO HELP YOU DURING GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

- Let the group lead the discussion and introduce the topics whenever possible. This reinforces the idea that you are in the community to listen to community members and to learn from them.
- Often, the group will move on to topics that you had not anticipated or abandon a topic that you would have liked to explore further. Informal group discussions naturally jump from place to place. Learn what you can, when you can, about the needs and interests of members. You can revisit those first topics another time. They can be a conversation starter the next time you are hanging out.
- Pay attention to people's specific concerns so that you can follow up individually after the group discussion is over. This allows for individual relationships to take root as well as acknowledging that you have heard the concerns of the individual.
- Always get back to an individual with any information they have requested. If the request cannot be met by the library, talk about another route the individual might try.



 THESE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS THAT THE PROJECT LIBRARIANS PARTICIPATED IN WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS. YOU WILL SEE HOW, IN MOST CASES, AN INFORMAL AND CASUAL APPROACH IS MORE LIKELY TO BE PRODUCTIVE THAN STICKING TO AN AGENDA.

GROUPS OF YOUTH

At Broadway Youth Resource Centre, there have been several opportunities to involve the youth in specific library service planning initiatives. To do this, I schedule meetings to bring the centre's youth together to discuss the issue at hand. I take care to schedule these meetings for times that do not conflict with other events or external factors, such as right after government assistance cheques are issued. I also provide ample food in the form of a meal, not snacks, to provide the centre's youth with incentive to participate. Meetings are then held as informal discussions, which I facilitate. Usually, I just introduce the issue and then open the floor for the group to discuss. This approach is often the most conducive for the group to generate ideas together. The youth normally interact in a more boisterous informal manner anyway, and so this is often the most productive and comfortable way for them to interact in such a meeting as well. It is impossible to take formal minutes in such a meeting, so I often simply jot down the key points that are made or write them up on a chalkboard or flip chart so the youth can refer back to them or correct me if I have misinterpreted. At some meetings, specifically when the youth were discussing VPL policy, I prepared flipcharts beforehand containing relevant information for the group for reference. I could then jot down the group's reactions to the flipchart contents directly onto the chart. Occasionally, I am able to bring someone else with me who can take notes, thus freeing me to concentrate on facilitating the discussion.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

AGENCY'S GROUP PROGRAMS

I was invited to participate in the last session of a program that was facilitated by a community agency for some of its clients. The group consisted of about ten women. The discussions were on topics introduced by the service providers. When I spoke to the women, they decided that they would like to continue meeting at the library. The focus of their future gatherings and discussions would be topics that they wanted information on.

Another group discussion opportunity arose when a partner agency facilitated a children's program that required parents to be in the building, but not necessarily with their children, during the program. I seized the opportunity to talk with the parents to find out if they would like to create a program for themselves. When they responded positively to the idea, I followed through with a collaborative planning process.

– Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

Technique 3: Attending Regular Meetings and Events

You can meet community members at various neighbourhood events and meetings. This can be an effective way to meet people who are not connected with service providers or with other community groups where you hang out. Your attendance makes a clear statement about the library's interest in the community and allows community members to see library staff as active participants in community processes.

Community events and meetings may be regular or irregular. You may have to ask around to find out about upcoming ones, especially if they are small and irregular. When you hear of a meeting or event, the following points can help you decide whether to attend and, if so, what to expect from yourself and the meeting.

- Keep your focus on relationship building and attend events to meet socially excluded community members, not the officials, business leaders, or service providers who may also be there.
- Periodically reflect on why you are still attending a meeting or event. What new information have you gathered? How is this changing library service? Have the meetings evolved into a familiar but unproductive pattern?
- Ask to be included as an agenda item if you are feeling uncomfortable or isolated at meetings. This is an opportunity to introduce yourself, discuss why you are attending the meeting, and invite people to talk to you about their concerns.
- Be clear that you are there to represent the library. You are not there as an individual who will take on fundraising or volunteering as a citizen.

At community meetings or informal get-togethers, community members often approached me privately to discuss fines and/or overdue items. I took down their names and promised to look into their records to see what I could do. In all cases, I was able to waive fines for the community members. I got back to each of them to let them know that they were now free to use their library cards. People were very grateful for this and took me more seriously because I acted quickly and kept my word.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development
Librarian

! THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES FROM THE PROJECT LIBRARIANS WILL HELP GIVE YOU IDEAS ABOUT WHERE AND HOW TO ATTEND EVENTS AND MEETINGS IN YOUR COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.

WEEKLY LUNCH

The Indian Metis Christian Fellowship serves a soup and bannock lunch weekly to between 25 and 50 people. This is a regular event, so I get to know individuals by name and can build on conversations from previous weeks. I also bring library books to display and they make good conversation starters.

I make a point of sitting with clients, rather than the service providers. The service providers often invite me to sit with them, but then the point in coming is lost.

- Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS

I made a conscious effort to attend the various school council meetings. By attending these meetings, I had the opportunity to network with parents and meet people I had not met at other community events. My presence served as a constant reminder to parents that the library was interested in the things that mattered to them and their children. I also had opportunities to talk to school staff about the community. After parents got used to me and recognised me as a familiar face in the community, they felt comfortable talking to me about their community concerns and about the library. These were very useful and valuable relationships because many parents, sometimes because of cultural or language barriers, did not attend any other type of community event.

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

MEETINGS AT SERVICE PROVIDER FACILITY

Coast Mental Health Clubhouse, a centre for adults recovering from mental illnesses, has small daily meetings within each of its units. The daily meetings are structured yet flexible. They have an agenda, but it is a loose one allowing for plenty of digressions, announcements, and new ideas.

On days that I conducted computer training sessions, I always came early enough to join the Communications unit meetings. Often, I contributed nothing of my own except to remind members that the class was taking place. Listening at the meetings was a useful two-way street. Members became very accustomed to seeing me around, so they were less anxious about taking computer training from me or approaching me about fines, library tours, and other topics. For my part, I felt better able to speak to Coast members about library services or anything else. The topics that members had mentioned in meetings gave me fodder with which to start conversations later.

- Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian

Keep In Mind

The examples and reflections in this Tool illustrate the importance of the relationship building process. While relationship building concepts are simple, they are not necessarily easy to apply right away and therefore need careful consideration.

Below are some important facets of relationship building. Some of the items have already been stressed throughout this Tool, while a few others have not yet been stated explicitly. Some of the items are treated in greater detail in *Tool 8: Customer Service*. Review and reflect on how they can apply to you, your library, and your community.

- **Confidence:** You may find it especially challenging to build relationships with community members when their experiences and background are radically different from your own. All of the Project librarians found that their confidence to work with a diversity of community members grew as they continued working to build relationships. Give yourself and community members time.
- **Self awareness and self evaluation:** Be sensitive to how you may appear or sound to the community. The objective is to have community members and library staff feel comfortable with each other. Actively reflect on your interactions with community members. Did I do all the talking? Did that sound patronising? Was I assuming something here? From this assessment, you can decide what skills and attitudes you might want to improve or adjust.
- **Stress Management:** Working with socially excluded people means you may sometimes hear stories about personal hardships, poverty, illness, addictions, and other difficult circumstances. Hearing these stories may become emotionally exhausting. It is helpful to be aware of this ahead of time and seek appropriate support for yourself when necessary. Always listen for opportunities to discover how the library, and not you as an individual, can be supportive.
- **Setting boundaries:** While it may be difficult at first to say no to personal requests such as a ride to a meeting or invitations to family events, think about what is appropriate given your role. For example, it is probably not appropriate to attend a community member's birthday party if this is a party at a home, restaurant, or other private location. But you could join in the birthday celebration, perhaps bringing a card, if there is cake for everyone at a service provider's space.
- **Listening:** A community member's comments probably grow from a context markedly different from your own. You want to listen well enough so that you begin to understand this context. Sensitivity to context will allow for a better understanding of community needs.

When I started meeting people in the community, I was most comfortable with people who were the most like me. I had to make a conscious effort to seek out people who were as unlikely to speak with me as I was to speak with them. I learned that meeting people in the community is not always a random process.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development Librarian

- **Humility:** Surrender your expertise. Community members may, out of habit or perception, try to place you in the role of expert. Be watchful and avoid reverting to that familiar paradigm.
- **Professional relationships:** Relationships need to be between community members and the librarian as the representative of the library. They are not personal friendships.
- **Relationships have depth:** Develop an initial contact into a relationship by actively engaging in discussions that focus on the community member's interests, perspective, concerns, needs, and wants. Effective relationships involve speaking with a person more than a couple of times. People are unlikely to reveal all this information to you right away.
- **Role of staff:** Be clear that you are building relationships within the context of library service planning. You are not taking on the role of other service professionals such as social workers. Your role is not to solve people's personal problems, nor to judge and report on their behaviour. Work with community members to understand what is important to them, what they need from the library, and how the library can most effectively meet that need.
- **Cultural protocols:** Be aware of the culture of various communities. Protocols, norms, values, customs, and beliefs are all important to consider when building relationships. This is something you can learn as you go.
- **Being proactive:** Building relationships requires active involvement. You do not need to wait for someone to approach you, as we often do in libraries. You can make the first move to introduce yourself to community members.
- **Engaging community interest:** People may not be immediately interested in talking with you. It can take the community some time to simply get used to seeing library staff in the neighbourhood.
- **Library experience:** Many socially excluded people have had negative experiences in the library and with library staff. See the discussion *Systemic Barriers* at the beginning of *Part II* of this Toolkit.
- **Research fatigue:** Socially excluded people may be sceptical and distrustful of researchers and they may associate librarians with researchers. Be prepared to talk about the difference between a short-term researcher in a community and a librarian representing the long-term commitment of the socially aware library.
- **Trust and Respect:** The Project librarians built trust with their communities incrementally over time by demonstrating commitment, by following through on promises, and by interacting with community members equitably and respectfully.

Through my work with the community, I found that even just one bad experience with an institution or person in authority could forever affect the way an individual interacts with service providers in general. Once an individual has been the victim of racism or discrimination, that individual is far less likely to trust people outside of their community.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development Librarian



next...

Tool 4

PARTNERSHIPS

- Definition
- Rationale
 - Credibility
 - Continuity
 - Support at Multiple Levels
 - Access to Community
- Application
 1. Determine Purpose of Partnerships
 2. Conduct Community Mapping to Identify Potential Partners
 3. Approach Potential Partners
 4. Determine Nature of Partnership
 5. Finalise Content of Partnership Agreement
 6. Establish and Build Relationships
 7. Evaluate Partnerships
- Keep In Mind
- Long-Term Benefits of Partnerships

Partnership with community organisations has been a critical part of enabling me to access socially excluded groups and individuals. When service providers invite me to talk to some of their clients, I am able to find out about their clients' needs. Once the needs have been identified, it has been very useful to partner with those same organisations to offer programs. Clients are already comfortable in the service provider's space and are interested in accessing library programs and services from those locations.

- Patti-Lynne McLeod, Community Development Librarian

Definition

A partnership is a recognised relationship between the library and a service provider in the community. The partnership can be as formal or informal, as suits the partner agency and the library. Although the library will benefit from community partnerships, this is not the primary purpose for entering into them. The actual purpose of partnerships is for the library to learn about the agency's services, connect with community members they serve, and provide appropriate community-led programs and services.

The partner agencies have no obligation to provide any specific services to the library in return, although many will choose to do so. Their part in the reciprocal agreement is to provide the library with access to their clients.

Rationale

There are several reasons for exploring partnerships with agencies in your community:

Credibility

Programs and services for socially excluded community members are often vulnerable to one-time project funding, which is tentative and temporary. Funding sometimes arrives and disappears abruptly. The Working Together Project librarians learned that service providers and their clients sometimes view the library as yet another of those bureaucracies which will parachute in with a great idea and then withdraw a year or two later, leaving conditions much as they were. If the library is interested in engaging with service providers and socially excluded community members, it may need to establish its credibility through a partnership. This will demonstrate that the library's commitment to the community is long-term and not merely part of an experiment.

Continuity

Programs and services change each time local governments, boards, or staff members revise their mandates. Partnerships provide a greater likelihood that relationships, programs, and services will endure despite turnover of specific individuals. The more partners that are available to support given community initiatives, the more likely these initiatives are to take root and grow. Partnerships can be crucial to a program's survival. Partnerships demonstrate a library's commitment to working with community partners on an ongoing basis.

Support at Multiple Levels

Individual librarians work hard to establish relationships and adopt the position of a learner in the community. A library as an organisation can also establish relationships and position itself as a learner and equal partner among other service providers. It is important to build trusting relationships at both the individual and the institutional level so that the two levels support the work of one another.

Access to Community

At its most practical level, a partnership can greatly enhance the library's access to a target audience. Community agencies provide diverse services and often use publicity and referrals to attract participants whom the library would not ordinarily reach.

Application

I have seen a benefit in creating formal partnerships. They seem to have created a sense of commitment to working with the library, even as staff and programs and clients change. The branch should think strategically about who its long-term community partners could be, and what it and its partners would have to offer each other. For example, a new multi-agency family services centre is being discussed for Spryfield, and it would be a real loss if the library was not part of that network from the beginning. Responding to requests from the centre later is not the same thing.

- Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

1. Determine Purpose of Partnerships

Ideally, your library is simply interested in broadening its community involvement, and you will have carte blanche to explore your community. You do not need a specific initiative or goal in order to create community partnerships. The desire to promote greater understanding, liaise with one another, and access community members who do not use the library are reasons enough.

In other cases, you may be operating with funding that is earmarked for a specific purpose, such as for literacy, for a certain neighbourhood, for single parents, for Aboriginal communities, or for other target community needs. Your quest for partners may be tied to a particular initiative, such as collection development. If this is the case, ask yourself if the partnerships you develop will have to dissolve at the end of the initiative. Knowing that the partnership is temporary may influence your selection for strategic reasons. You do not want to select an agency that has already been subjected to a number of haphazard, temporary programs and whose staff and clients now feel cynical about such endeavours. Ongoing partnerships are preferable over temporary ones whenever possible. On the other hand, the short term initiative may provide the foundation for a long-term relationship. Consider these issues and possibilities in advance.

2. Conduct Community Mapping to Identify Potential Partners

You may already have some ideas for potential partnerships. If not, develop a community asset map to help you determine which community agencies provide services to your target group. *Tool 2: Community Mapping* will give you the information you need to conduct this exercise. Community mapping will also allow you to assess the potential for partnerships when meeting with community agencies. Carefully document potential areas of partnership—this will provide you with a quick reference for current and future partnerships.

take the time you need



3. Approach Potential Partners

Explore with your potential partner how the partnership might work. The meetings and discussions you have will vary with each potential partnership. Sometimes, one or two informal conversations will be enough. Other agencies have complex reporting structures and need approval at many layers before agreeing to even the most informal partnership. Understand their hesitation or their administrative protocol and allow potential partners all the time they need. Remember that it is important for the partnership to work for the community, so ensure that the partner's needs—not the library's—are your primary guide for defining the nature and details of the partnership.

In these early discussions, be clear about the community-led process. Explain that you will want direct access to the partner's clients and members, not just its staff.

4. Determine Nature of Partnership

Decide with your partner whether you will have a formal partnership agreement or an informal partnership arrangement. A formal partnership involves a signed agreement, while an informal partnership needs only a verbal agreement. For certain partners, a formal agreement might be advantageous, as it may enhance their stature in the community or increase the funding they attract. Investigate whether your own library has any policies regarding the number and types of formal partnerships it may have.

Some partners may feel that a formal document could create obligations in time or resources that they cannot meet. Informal arrangements are simpler and more comfortable in such cases. An informal arrangement is equally professional and is as important as a formal partnership would be. Your relationships with staff and community members would be the same. Be prepared to discuss each type of partnership and allow your community partner the final decision whenever possible.

As well as working with old partners, I am forming new partnerships with organisations in North Central that are interested in being part of the literacy program. These partnerships will be unique in that literacy tutoring can happen at any partnering agency. Learners can go wherever they feel most comfortable as opposed to the library's existing structured programs.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development Librarian



5. Finalise Content of Partnership Agreement

If you and your partner decide to develop a formal partnership, you will need to have a written agreement in place. The needs of each partner and its clients will always be unique, so there is no standard, sample agreement format to follow. If your library system has already developed a standard partnership agreement, you may need to use that. Be aware, however, that if the standard agreement is too formally structured, some agencies may be reluctant to commit to it. Find out if you can alter the standard agreement to make it more flexible and suitable.



WHEN YOU WORK OUT THE DETAILS WITH YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNER, TRY TO INCLUDE, BUT NOT LIMIT YOUR DISCUSSION TO, THE TOPICS BELOW.

- **Purpose.** Be sure that your community partner understands that you want direct access to its clients or members. Partnership activities are not meant to be limited to agency and library staff.
- **Objectives.** If you have specific objectives for your partnership, state them in the agreement. In all other cases, your partnership goals can be kept open-ended, so that you will not be limited later as you get to know the community and generate new ideas with them. An open-ended statement might be, “to meet community members who use this space and involve them in discussions about library programs and services,” or “to explore with staff and clients possible ways the library can provide more effective programs and services to meet the needs of the community.”
- **Parameters.** Outline the library’s commitments. Keep your approach simple to start, but also build flexibility into the agreement. You might begin simply by agreeing to visit for an hour or two each week at a suitable time. Your partner might ask that you participate in a given activity (or not) while you are there.

For its role, the partner only needs to commit to allowing the library access to its space and its clients. You may find, however, that they want to commit to something more than that. If this is the case, explore with them how this commitment can be part of the partnership. They may want to include it as part of the partnership agreement or they may be happier making it an informal element of the partnership.

- **Administration.** Confirm any paperwork, reports, or record keeping that may be required. Do not create any administrative procedures that are not truly needed.
- **Communication.** Discuss how frequently you will meet to review and evaluate the partnership. Be sure that either partner is free to request a meeting at any time.
- **Change.** Include the flexibility to have any aspects of the partnership evaluated and altered at any time.

turn here



6. Establish and Build Relationships

Once the partnership is in place, begin to get to know both the staff and its clients. Please refer to *Tool 3: Relationship Building* for ideas on meeting and talking with people in the community.

7. Evaluate Partnerships


Exactly how often you meet with your partner to evaluate the partnership, and the form these meetings will take, can be included as part of the agreement. Some agencies' head offices may require an annual formal evaluation report with set statistics and categories. If such a report is required, discuss how these needs can be met in the simplest way possible, without influencing the flexible and community-led nature of the work you will be conducting.

When you evaluate your partnerships, there are a number of things to keep in mind. As with all relationships, partnerships evolve over time and go through various stages and degrees of activity. Do not be too concerned if a once active partnership tapers off for a period of time. Each agency will be faced with its own challenges and programming needs, and these needs will change over time. If your partner is going through a period where they just do not have the time or resources to engage in activities with the library, perhaps they will again in the future. Wherever possible, keep in regular contact with a partner to remind them of the library's presence.

Because of the high stress nature of the work, some community agencies experience significant staff turnover. Bringing new staff up to date on your partnership with them can be time consuming, but is a critical aspect of maintaining the partnership. The same holds true for times when you have staff changes within your library.

I am glad that we have a partnership with the Women's Economic Equality Society. If I had offered to provide computer training, and the format had not immediately worked, the staff might have said, "This isn't suitable for our group." Instead, I made it clear that I am willing to work with the group intensively over time to continually adjust our services to meet their needs. Without the evidence of a partnership, the group would not have recognised our commitment to work with them over time.

– Darla Muzzerall,
Community Development Librarian

 HERE ARE SOME DESCRIPTIONS OF A FEW PARTNERSHIPS THE WORKING TOGETHER PROJECT HAD WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THEIR TARGET COMMUNITIES. NOTICE HOW SOME ACTIVITIES EVOLVED WITH PARTNERS EVEN WHEN A LINK WITH THE LIBRARY WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. YOU CAN ALSO SEE FROM THESE EXAMPLES HOW THE LIBRARIES AND THEIR PARTNERS ACTIVELY LEARNED FROM EACH OTHER.

PARTNERSHIPS EVOLVE

The Working Together Project's partnership with Coast Mental Health began with the Project librarian having access to Coast's Clubhouse in order to meet and talk with clients and staff. Clients at Coast are persons recovering from mental illnesses. Over time we developed a computer training program that fit the needs and interests of participants and fit into the scheduled routines of Coast staff. The computer training took place at the Clubhouse.

The partnership was flexible and relationships with clients and staff were strong, so we frequently had both casual and formal discussions about what else we could do together. After a couple of years, we decided to focus more on transitioning Coast members toward using the neighbourhood library branch. Such a transition suited Coast's new mandate to mainstream their clients into the community rather than keeping them isolated at the Clubhouse and feeling "special." In order to help the clients transition to mainstream environments, an easing-in process was important. Familiar faces and existing relationships were significant and these we had already developed with members.

The Programs Manager of the Clubhouse offered to have the branch library use Coast's computer lab to conduct training sessions that would now be open to the general public, not strictly to Coast members. This was a brilliant idea, as the cramped local branch had no training space of its own. This decision benefited the branch, and it also benefited Coast's clients in their efforts to mainstream. The shared lab gave the clients some controlled exposure to the general public—in a "real" public computer course—but with familiar faces for instructors and their own space for location.

In addition, the Manager wanted to create and present a training program on mental illness to the branch library staff. The program would address such questions as, "What does the branch look like and feel like through the eyes of a Coast client? What about the other community members who are not Coast clients, but who live with mental illness just the same? How can this branch specifically help to ease the experience for mentally ill community members?" Eventually, this training would be adapted for staff at other library branches system-wide.

We didn't ask for any of these benefits from Coast. The ideas gradually evolved through observation and discussion with Coast staff and members. It is as though the partnership itself had its own growth and maturity pattern just as individual relationships grow and mature.

The Programs Manager at Coast has been so impressed with the benefits and possibilities offered by our Working Together Project partnership that he has since created new partnerships for Coast with other partners, such as community fitness centres.

- Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian



LEARNING STRATEGIES

Our informal partner Bridging the Gap (BTG) asked if their staff could attend the computer basics class that the Working Together Project conducted with socially excluded community members. BTG was quite intrigued by the program, and wanted to see how they might work the content into their own lesson plans. Their learners have low literacy, low vision, brain damage, or mental challenges. BTG thought that if the skills were covered step-by-step and students were taught basic computer vocabulary, it might take up to a year for some of their participants to master computer basics and the Internet. However, in our casual use of laptops during literacy sessions, those same learners completed tasks with enthusiasm and efficiency if they focused on learning what needed to be done to meet their immediate needs or answer their immediate questions. Because of this, we began to look at a combination of the two approaches as we continued our partnership.

– Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

NON-TRADITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

One of our partners in Halifax was the local food bank. Over time, we learned from some community members that they wanted to be able to read books to their children. Based on these discussions, we connected community members with the adult literacy coordinator at the local library branch. We also learned that some food bank clients didn't know how to use unusual ingredients they received. We arranged for the food bank to give out the library branch phone number so people could call for simple ideas and recipes using the ingredient. This partnership established a unique and ongoing link between food bank users, literacy programs, and the branch library.

– Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian

Keep In Mind

BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS AS YOU PURSUE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY.

- Although the library's partnership is with the service provider, be sure to establish relationships with clients and community members themselves.
- If you create a formal partnership, try to write the agreement collaboratively with your partner. Some service providers may prefer that you draw up the agreement yourself and just bring it for them to sign. They may simply not have time to work on it with you. If this is the case, write a simple agreement incorporating points you have already discussed with your partner.

- You will probably notice some overlap in services or clients among service providers. For example, one service provider may offer literacy programs for single parents and another may provide literacy programs for refugees. Some community members may be eligible to visit one or both of these agencies. This overlap is acceptable and can be advantageous.
- Service provider staff who work directly with the community will have important ideas about what the partnership might include, but the person with final authority to sign the agreement might be a board member or director who has limited daily contact with the community. If this is the case, be sure that all individuals have participated in developing the agreement.
- At some partner agencies, you may work with volunteers rather than paid staff. Be aware that it may be more difficult to contact volunteers and that there could be more turnover amongst volunteers than staff.
- You may encounter a lack of interest in partnering from certain service providers. Large influential agencies that are independent and have strong community ties may not see themselves as needing partnerships in order to better provide for the community. It can be difficult to start a partnership in such situations. Continue to stay in occasional contact with them and to maintain some communication, should they ever decide to explore a partnership after all.
- Some service providers, including the library, may resist partnerships because they do not see any common links between the library and the agency's clients' needs. For example, what do an emergency shelter and the library have in common? Try to think in terms of what the partners could achieve in common, not what they already have in common. You do not need specific ideas to begin with, but can develop ideas through discussions.

Volunteers run all of the church's programs and working with volunteers is very different than working with paid staff. The volunteers at Lighthouse All Nations Church don't have offices or phone numbers at the Church, and they can be very difficult to contact. Also, they have limited experience with program planning, especially programs involving more than one partner. As a result, they were very uncertain about the details and planning of the cooking and nutrition program. Overall, these challenges should not preclude a formal partnership. We just need to be aware of the challenges that may arise and be prepared to handle them.

- Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

the benefits



Long-Term Benefits of Partnerships

As highlighted in the examples, libraries and their partners learn from each other. This was a commonly noticed benefit among all of the Working Together Project librarians and partners. For example, one of the partners learned, from the librarian, new ways of connecting with clients by adopting the community-led approach. Another partner felt that, due to the partnership, clients at their facility developed “tangible” and “soft” skills such as social interaction and expanding comfort zones—skills which, due to funding constraints, are not often the focus of programming. Other Project partners reported similar experiences of learning new skills, learning more about the library as a resource, or finding new ways to connect with their own members. The Project librarians all reported learning new ways of connecting and collaborating with community members by being involved with their partners.

The library benefits in numerous other ways from its partners. The immediate benefit is access to community members who do not use the library. Other benefits reported by the Project sites included use of computer labs and activity rooms, sharing professional development opportunities, and learning about the community.

Increasing the library’s profile in the community is a benefit of significant impact. One Project librarian explained that, for some partners, the library “wasn’t really on the radar as a community service: it was mostly valued as a place for kids’ books.” Partnerships changed that perception. Other Project partners indicated that for most participants, their knowledge of the library widened, they had more interest in the library, and their stereotypes of the library had broken down. The results from discussions with a Project partner regarding a new proposed book drop at a halfway house are particularly telling: the residents rejected the proposal because “they didn’t want to lose a reason to go the library.”

Innovative partnerships with service providers actively shift and expand the knowledge of how libraries view their role in the community. It can be exciting to pool resources and find common ground with a greater range of organisations than have traditionally engaged the library.

An expanded awareness of what the library can do and the services it can provide presents a different lens through which local agencies view the library. This, in turn, can ripple throughout the community because of the broad range of individuals with whom service providers interact.

I think it is the interaction of the Working Together Project, library system support, branch library support, community group staff, and community members themselves who will co-create blended learning opportunities.

– Darla Muzzerall,
Community
Development
Librarian



need a lift?

Tool 5

PROGRAM PLANNING

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 1. Identify a Need or Interest
 2. Engage Community Members in Planning
 3. Conduct and Evaluate the Program and the Process

The first time I was engaged in collaborative service planning, I didn't recognise what was happening. I now realise that collaborative planning with community members rarely looks like planning done by librarians and library staff. What I came to understand was that we shouldn't, and couldn't, assume that collaborative community planning would have the same parameters and trajectory as in-house library planning.

– Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

Definition

Libraries plan and deliver a wide range of programs for their communities, intending to serve all members. Programs cater to all ages, beginning with storytimes for infants and toddlers and continuing with an exciting range of workshops, performances, speakers, and courses for adults and seniors. Program planning in traditional library service models has a simple goal: to deliver programs that people will attend and enjoy. Program planning in the context of the Community-Led Service Planning Model has the same goal, broadened to ensure that all types (not just ages) of people, especially socially excluded community members, will attend and enjoy the programs.

The key differences between the two models lie in how the programs are conceived, planned, and delivered. Program planning in the community-led context means collaborating directly with community members to define, develop, and deliver programs. The result of the community-led planning process is programs or events based on community-articulated needs, and in which the community has a personal interest and investment.

Rationale

Traditional library programming is considered successful when it draws packed rooms and thankful comments from participants. But significant numbers of people of all ages have never attended or even considered a library program. Many people are not even aware that the library offers programs. If they are aware, they still do not feel comfortable attending them.

Socially excluded individuals do not engage with library programming for the same reasons they do not engage with the library in general: their needs and interests are not addressed by program content or delivery, and they feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. To change this, libraries need to involve socially excluded community members in the entire process of program planning—even before the first program ideas might be expressed.

Application

As you read this Tool, you will quickly see that community-led program planning involves applying the Community-Led Service Planning Model to the program planning process. See the section of this Toolkit on the *Community-Led Service Planning Model* for necessary background.

While the steps in community-led program planning are straightforward, time must be allowed for the process to unfold. Also, while they are numbered in this Tool, some steps are best taken concurrently rather than sequentially, and evaluation must be ongoing rather than limited only to the end of the program. In general, community-led program planning includes the following steps:

1. Collaboratively identify a need or interest for the program.
2. Engage community members in planning discussions.
3. Collaboratively conduct and evaluate the program and the process.

Be creative working with the community in your program planning and adapt the processes outlined in this Tool to suit the community you work with and the resources available to you.

1. Identify a Need or Interest

The ability to identify a need for programming presupposes that relationships have already been established between library staff and community members. In the context of these relationships, ideas to meet programming needs will emerge through a variety of sources, such as feedback from community members in existing or previous programs, discussions with community members in casual conversation or at meetings, and observation of the types of library materials people frequently request.

Like the librarian in the following example, you may find that identifying a programming need becomes much easier when you abandon the traditional sense of how programs and planning should look and feel.

UNSTRUCTURED PROGRAMS

With one of our partners, Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), “programming” as we know it within libraries simply hasn’t worked. The Centre itself already hosts a broad range of scheduled programs, some of which struggle to maintain cohesion, and so it’s difficult to fit in “yet another” program. The youth at the Centre are often at odds with other sources of structure in their lives, such as school, and therefore resist most things that look formal and structured. When they come to the Centre, for the most part, they just want to chill.

As a result of this, the Working Together Project’s library programming takes on a very different form at BYRC. Instead of presenting formal, structured programs, I listen to whatever the youth discuss and see if I can bring materials to support these interests on subsequent visits. The youth in the centre are sometimes looking for casual things to do while waiting for friends to show up or for an appointment to occur. If the youth show an interest in what I bring, I try to draw them out further on this interest. With origami materials, for example, I asked them what particular things they would like to learn how to fold and if there were other types of paper-crafts they were interested in, and so on. I then respond to this as soon as I can, usually the next time I visit.

To an outside observer, this would not look like programming in the traditional sense. Rather it looks like a chaotic, frequently changing group of young people teaching themselves origami or doing Tarot readings. My role is quite minimal—sometimes just to provide the materials, sometimes to give one-to-one assistance with an activity. Nonetheless, this is the programming approach that works at BYRC and, most importantly, it’s what the youth want to do. They tell me what they’re interested in, I get as much detail as I can about it (although sometimes all I get is “can you bring books on X” before the conversation shifts somewhere else), and then I bring whatever is needed for them to be able to explore this interest.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

explorers this way



2. Engage Community Members in Planning

EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS

Your first conversations around program planning will be truly exploratory. Community members may or may not be expecting to be involved in the process. You may need to resist the urge to take over or make too many helpful suggestions. If you wish to set any goal at all initially, it would be to find ways to identify, attract, and engage a larger number of people for further discussions.

Beginning these discussions is easiest when members already have a defined meeting time and space. Service providers in the community often have drop in or set times for members to gather. When this is not the case, coordinating discussions can be a significant challenge and you will need to find innovative locations and times to speak to community members as a group. One Project librarian was able to solve this by identifying a young children's outdoor sports program where parents (the target group) remained on site during the program. Be alert for similarly non-traditional opportunities in your community.

At this exploratory stage, conversations about programs can still begin and be productive with a very small number of people. If these initial conversations are promising, the number will grow.

ATTRACT AND INVOLVE ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Once you have found even just a few people to speak with, the community members themselves can usually suggest the best way of engaging additional members in the planning process. For example, a librarian visiting a senior's housing complex took the suggestion made by two residents to invite additional residents to a breakfast planning meeting. Another librarian was able to connect with new Central American immigrants by pursuing one community member's referral to a Spanish Breakfast program at a neighbourhood church.

ENGAGE IN PLANNING WITH LARGER GROUP

Once again, a significant challenge may involve simply organising a meeting time and space that works for enough of the interested community members. The ideal location and time is one in which these particular community members already gather and feel comfortable. Community members will likely have suggestions. Consider if your community members frequent neighbourhood church events, housing complexes, service providers' spaces, community centres, playing fields, school PAC meetings, or an inexpensive café.

During the planning itself, remember to let go of the "expert" mentality. This also means letting go of tasks we traditionally think of as our own. In the case of collaborative program planning, be aware of how the community may want to be involved in programs. They may not want to be simply participants—they may want to lead the programs as well. A parents' group may want to read stories and lead activities themselves. Students in computer training programs may want to deliver instruction once they feel they have mastered the skills being taught. The programs you plan will not be truly theirs unless the community is allowed to choose and define its role.

Be sure that your discussions include not only what the program will be about, but also how it should be conducted and promoted. Keep your language simple so that your discussions cover, for example, "Who / What / Where / When / Why / How" instead of jargon like "target audience / method of delivery / format of program."



THE EXAMPLE BELOW HIGHLIGHTS THE DISCUSSION PROCESS.

SURRENDERING THE LEAD

My first experience with collaborative planning was with a group of young adults from LOVE (Leave Out Violence). At first, it seemed that our conversations were simply extensions of the conversations I associated with the relationship building process. All the youth were doing LOVE's photojournalism course and many were writers and artists. The writers in the group were talking about poetry readings and how they didn't think that they should have to be published in order to be respected as poets or to do poetry readings in local cafés. Hearing this made me think that I could arrange a poetry reading. I thought I might nudge the conversation in this direction to see how the youth reacted, but they didn't respond at all to my suggestion that the library "might be able to host a reading for them." I thought I had found a "solution" for the need they expressed but then realised that either my solution, or the need that was expressed, was not significant to the group.

As a librarian, I was trained to look for solutions. Here I was with what I thought was a pretty good idea, but this group just ignored my suggestion and went on to talk about their photographs. At one point in the conversation, one youth asked if the library had an 'in' with an art gallery. The idea was to have a showing of the photojournalism students' photographs. I was careful this time not to jump to a "solution" even though I knew that the library had gallery space. Instead, I listened to the youth talk more about their idea. At the end of the evening, all we really had was a germ of an idea for some sort of event that involved showing the youth's photographs.

Ultimately, the YA librarian got involved in these discussions—as did the library's facilities coordinator. The youth at LOVE arranged for their photographs to be framed by a community member willing to do the work almost for free, and the library installed them in the library's gallery. The youth at LOVE also suggested that they hold their photojournalism graduation ceremony at the same time as the gallery installation. Once they were sure of their idea and knew what they wanted, they worked with the library to make it all happen. As a result, they felt a sense of ownership.

It's hard to capture the meanderings, contradictions, and dead ends that were all part of the discussions leading up to and including the planning of this event. It is worth noting, though, that it takes a lot of time to plan with the community, and a lot of self-restraint not to jump in to ensure that a solution is reached. In the end, collaborative service and program planning link the community to the library in ways that traditional library based planning can not. LOVE's first graduation ceremony and photo installation drew over 80 youth and their families to the library. LOVE continues to hold graduation ceremonies at the library.

– Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

hang in there



LIAISE WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS OR OTHERS

There may be others who are affected by your program plans, and these people will have to be included in the planning process before any decisions can be finalised. For example, if the program takes place in a service provider's or other community space, you will need to ensure there are no conflicting programs, staff vacations, scheduled lunch breaks, local regulations, or any other situations that may create difficulties. If you are holding the program at the library, there may be concerns such as whether the library's logo must be used on posters about the program or if alternative forms of registration are needed.

When community members define a program or service they would like, the library's first reaction might be "we don't do that" or "we can't fund that." The librarian should work with the community members to find out about the outcomes they want—then figure out processes that would help achieve the results they want. Community expressions of expectations should not be tempered by what the library does or doesn't do.

– Darla Muzzerall,
Community Development Librarian

FINALISE, FOLLOW UP, AND CONFIRM PLANS

As with any planning process, you will likely need more than one meeting to complete the plans. Some ideas will have to be changed after you have liaised with staff in the proposed location. Sometimes, people change their minds or come up with a better idea after the meeting is over. Stay flexible and be careful not to over plan, but be diligent about following up with community members.

3. Conduct and Evaluate the Program and the Process

Regardless of how much planning has occurred, there may still be a need to change plans on the spot based on community feedback. The flexibility to do this should be built in to all stages of a program. Evaluation is a dynamic process that is embedded within the delivery of the program, and this ongoing evaluation will influence how the program is conducted.

Library staff traditionally deliver programs and then evaluate afterwards, but the Community-Led Service Planning Model calls for program leaders to respond while the program is occurring. Ask participants if the program is going where they want it to go. If it is not, change it right away—do not wait until the next time you offer the program. Respond to the participants who are there at the time, so that they get the program they want.

In addition to the program itself, evaluate the entire planning process. Evaluation may be anecdotal or may be seen in participants' future interest (or lack thereof) in collaboratively planned programs. Keep the stories passed to the library system by individuals about the impact of the collaborative programming process on their lives. This can include a wide range of outcomes, such as new skills development, more community exposure and social contacts, increased income, a greater sense of pride, or increased use and knowledge of the library.

If the community members show an interest in holding another collaboratively planned program, this is another indication that they had a positive experience. If a program is successful, the community should be aware that you will help them sustain it, which may be done through providing information, connections, space, or other resources.



BELOW ARE MORE EXAMPLES FROM PROJECT LIBRARIES, WHICH DEMONSTRATE A NUMBER OF WAYS TO ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAM PLANNING.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

In Halifax, we noticed that many of the local community members in Greystone were either interested in or were already creating various types of low cost arts and crafts. Some people indicated that they sell their crafts to supplement their incomes. We were able to identify these local artisans through various means, including community members' own interest in materials related to arts and crafts, artists who were displaying materials in public locations, and informal connections.

Based on this identified community interest, we talked with local socially excluded community members and identified times and locations to meet, both in the branch and in the community, in order to create arts and crafts projects. In addition, the local branch provided a display case and each individual artisan was asked if he or she would like to display work in the branch. Numerous artists who had displayed their work in the branch, as well as members of the various arts and crafts groups, initiated a discussion relating to holding an arts and crafts show.

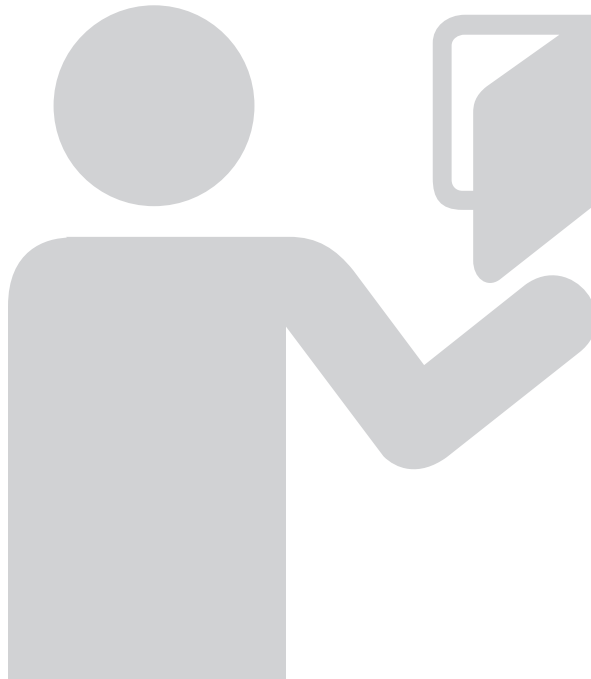
We obtained approval for the group to hold a local arts and crafts fair at the branch. Artisans who participated in the event created promotional materials and worked through other details to hold the event.

A total of 16 artisans participated in the event, four of whom came from the Greystone community. After the arts and crafts event, we recognised the importance of the group becoming independent from the library. The arts and crafts group discovered that, in order to sell their work in community locations without paying commissions or fees, they needed to seek status as a not-for-profit organisation. To accomplish this, they needed to develop an executive. All four leaders of the new executive—the secretary, treasurer, chair and vice-chair—are socially excluded members of the community. The group meets regularly in the library once or twice a month and is now self-sustaining.

– Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian



SMALL BUSINESS



At a Working Together Project's Advisory Council meeting where a guest from the business sector was present, there were several questions raised by Advisory Council members related to small business. It became clear that the concept of a small business, as defined in Canadian business culture, was not understood by the Advisory Council members and, by extension, many community members.

Through subsequent follow-up meetings and conversations with Advisory Council and community members, we conceived a workshop that would target such topics as, "What is a small business?" and "Is a small business the right fit for me?"

On several subsequent occasions, I asked the Advisory Council members for feedback:

- To find out what kind of speaker they would be interested in having;
- To select the speaker they would like to hear;
- To finalise the format of the program and the information that would be delivered;
- To evaluate the workshop immediately after it took place;
- To evaluate the workshop and planning process retrospectively at a later meeting; and
- To find out what the next step could be.

- Sonia Pacheco,
Community Development Librarian

LITERACY

Through focus groups and informal conversations with community residents and service providers, we learned that literacy was a major need in the community. I worked with all of our partners in the community to recruit tutors from within the North Central community. This included North Central Community Centre, North Central Family Centre, Rainbow Youth Centre, and Indian Metis Christian Fellowship. In partnership with the Regina Public Library Literacy Unit, we hired and trained literacy tutors who lived in the North Central community. These tutors were then matched up with learners from the community. The pairs worked on reading, writing, basic mathematics, or whatever the learners needed help with. The program was based entirely on community input and continued to evolve and improve based on input from the learners and tutors themselves.

- Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development Librarian

RESUMÉS

At Coast Mental Health, our original set of computer training classes included word processing. Members frequently commented how these skills would be helpful for creating their resumés and cover letters. The topic came up so frequently that members and staff at Coast eventually asked me to create specific classes on resumés and cover letters. Identifying this need in the community evolved readily out of our existing relationship and program.

Planning the program with members revealed some differences between what I assumed members would want during such a class and what the members actually wanted. For example, I initially supposed that members would find it useful and interesting to look at library books full of sample resumés, but this was not the case. Members didn't want to waste time looking at someone else's resumé. Their priority was to end up with a usable resumé of their own. I had also supposed that these courses would provide a terrific link with existing job search and resumé-building resources in our Central Library, but members were much more comfortable learning at Coast and did not want to pursue programs at Central at that time.

We had two or three different instructors for the program, each of whom understood the need to be flexible and readily adapted class activities based on members' additional feedback during the class itself.

- Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

When I first began to work with the community to develop programs, branch staff told me numerous times that, "We already tried that! It didn't work." At times it was very discouraging to have staff react in this manner. The truth was that staff may have tried a similar program, but they had not approached it in the same manner. The community had not been involved in the program development and efforts had not been made to remove barriers to library service. I tried to explain how the Working Together Project's approach was different from traditional library initiatives. At the same time, I always listened very closely to staff input, and tried to learn from their past experience. When community-led programming is first attempted, there is likely to be some resistance from staff who feel that their abilities are being questioned.

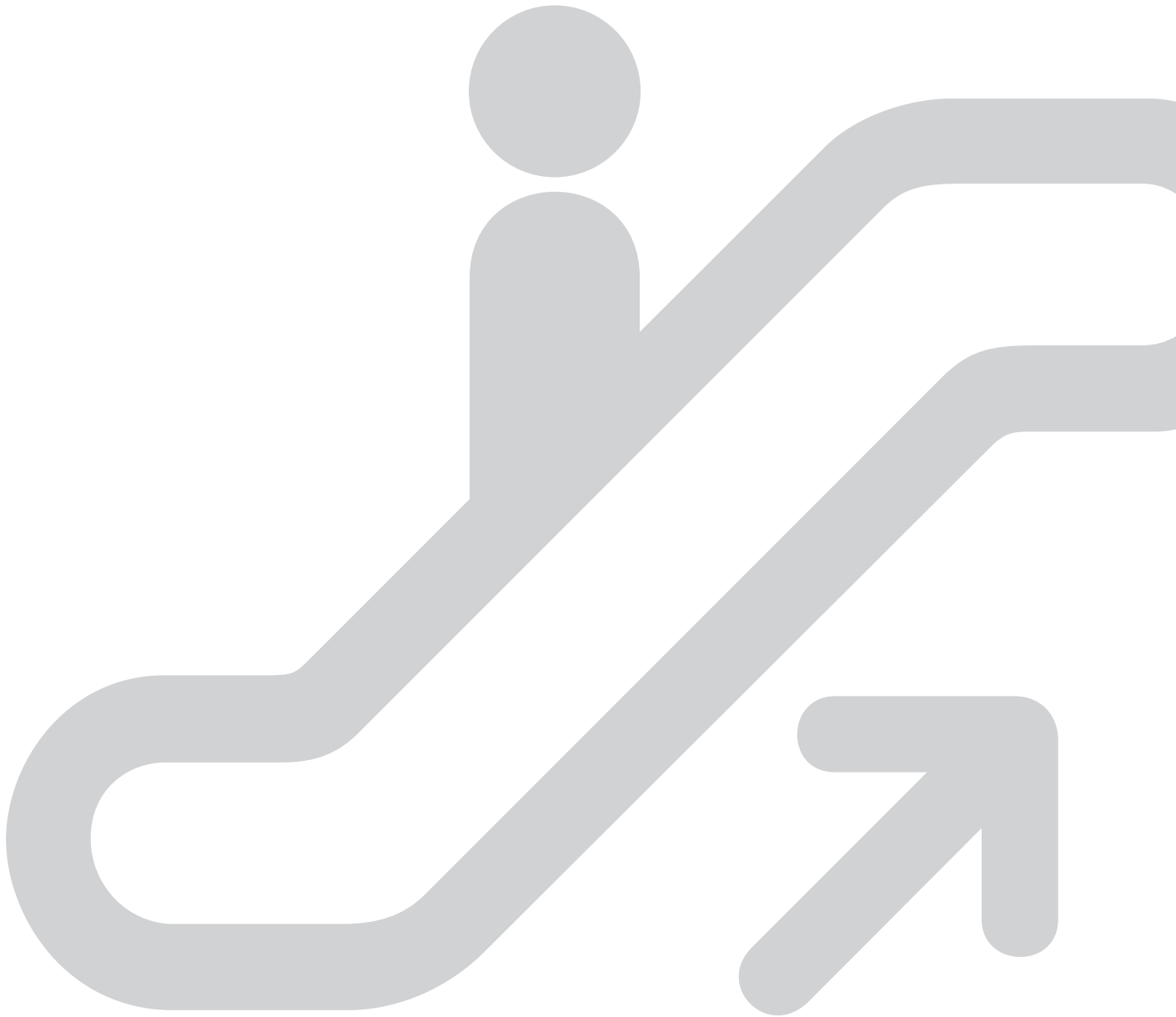
- Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development Librarian



tool 6



watch your step



Tool 6

COMPUTER TRAINING

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 1. Establish Comfortable Relationships
 2. Identify Needs and Interests with Community Members
 3. Collaborate with Community Members to Define Format and Content
 - One-to-One Models
 - Group Training Models
 4. Provide Instruction with Flexibility
 5. Evaluate Planning Process and Program
- Keep In Mind

The digital divide splits the community into two groups: those who go to the library for its technology and those who avoid libraries because they might have to use technology. The second group often doesn't think of the library as a place that can help them.

– Ken Williment,
Community Development Librarian

Definition

Computer training refers to a program or service that helps people increase their ability to use computers, as well as their knowledge, selection, use, and evaluation of electronic information and tools. This can mean becoming just familiar enough with a computer to gain some confidence, developing the skills needed for writing a resumé, researching a topic, or playing an online game for enjoyment.

Common examples of beginners' instruction include learning to use the keyboard and mouse, setting up a personal email account, searching the library's online catalogue, and exploring the Internet. However, computer training is not limited to beginners and can encompass many electronic activities depending upon the needs and interests expressed by the community.

Two essential components of computer training are the encouragement of hands-on practice and the promotion of information literacy. Information literacy refers to the ability to understand and evaluate electronic information or activities, not merely "do" them. Learners need to understand the context of the information on the Internet in order to answer questions such as "Can I trust and use this information? Is this site promoting a product or point of view? When was this last updated? What does .com or .gc.ca or .org tell me about the website?"

The phrase Information and Communications Technology (ICT) instruction is a more comprehensive term than computer training because ICT captures and incorporates the concept of information literacy. Computer training remains the commonly used phrase within most communities, so throughout this Tool the phrases "ICT instruction" and "computer training" are used interchangeably, as are the terms "training" and "instruction."

Rationale

People need ICT literacy for most occupations. It is no longer possible to avoid computer use in the workplace or to believe computers are the domain of specialised staff. Much of the information people need for everyday personal decisions requires access to the Internet. Communications for parents from their children's schools, such as newsletters or notices of meetings, are frequently delivered online. In libraries, the catalogue is online as are many other resources. Governments and private companies are increasingly discontinuing print distribution of documents in favour of faster and cheaper online distribution.

People with lower literacy skills are less likely to own or use computers. People without computer skills are more often excluded from the economy and from full participation in mainstream society. Although computer training opportunities already exist in libraries, socially excluded individuals are unlikely to feel comfortable finding, registering, and participating in a traditional mainstream course. Consider the analogy of someone who is an absolute beginner with their first musical instrument. How comfortable would they be taking a beginner's music class if, when they came to register, the person they spoke to used jargon (such as *time signature* and *key of D major*), and this convinced the person that the other participants could already read music? The level of discomfort and alienation experienced by this new music student is comparable to the level of discomfort and alienation experienced by the new computer user. Libraries need to make computer training more inviting, accommodating, and personally relevant for socially excluded community members. They can only do so by engaging community members in collaboratively defining both the content and the delivery of the training.

Application

In programs developed collaboratively with learners, the topics as well as the style of instruction will be determined by the learners. You do not need to duplicate programs, nor the methods of program delivery, that are already offered in a conventional manner in your library. To help keep you focused on community members' needs, keep in mind the motto that many librarians in the Project adopted: *Teach people, not courses.*

Most computer training in the Project followed a fairly simple framework, which you can readily adapt to suit most situations.

1. Establish Comfortable Relationships

Community-led ICT instruction always begins with relationship building between library staff and community members. A relationship must first be in place before you can begin to learn about the needs and wants of the target group directly from group members. Some familiarity between library staff and prospective students helps people feel comfortable taking a class or learning something new. This comfort level is often the most important concern for people when they are considering computer training. They do not feel that their lack of computer skills is something to be embarrassed about or hidden because they know the instructor, or the library staff, and there is a shared respect for each other and a desire to learn together.

2. Identify Needs and Interests with Community Members

It is important to assess if or how using technology would help people attain their goals. Some people may wish that they could be more involved with their families in other cities, so sharing photos and email messages could become one way for them to feel connected. Other people may have a more generalised wish to feel included when acquaintances talk about the Internet. Some learners may be thinking of increasing their employability. Still others may be at a place in their lives in which learning ICT skills is not an immediate priority and will not help them in meeting their current goals. These individuals can be assured that the option will still be available to them at some future time.

Service providers may feel they know the needs of their clients, but those needs may not be the same ones as clients express themselves. For example, Project librarians found that service provider staff sometimes wanted library staff to focus immediately on training in particular computer skills. After getting to know the service provider and its clients, it became clear that the clients were not interested in learning specific software applications such as Excel or Access, but instead wanted to learn to create newsletters or signs. The service provider, on the other hand, had made a commitment to their funders to deliver computer skills including spreadsheets and databases. It is important for you to be aware that these types of discrepancies exist and not to become a service provider for the service provider. You should remain focused on understanding and meeting the needs of the community as the community expresses those needs.

seeing is believing



! HERE ARE TWO EXAMPLES FROM THE PROJECT THAT WILL HELP YOU SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARIAN’S RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AND HOW RELATIONSHIP BUILDING HELPS TO IDENTIFY INDIVIDUALS’ LEARNING NEEDS INFORMALLY.

LAPTOPS AT THE COFFEE TABLE

When we conducted computer training at the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship, we didn’t sit in the lab. Instead, we hung out at the coffee table, joined in the conversation, and invited individuals to attend the session in the lab. Two to three people attended, usually after some encouragement from us, but there was a notable reluctance to move from the coffee table to the computer lab.

To offset the reluctance, we decided to put laptops on the coffee table. The response was enthusiastic with a lot of interaction and bantering. Some individuals who had never used a computer before got involved and people began helping each other. There was a very good-humoured atmosphere. We were available to help people with whatever they needed while taking part in the conversations and further developing relationships with the individuals. They even asked us to bring more computers.

This approach differs from a traditional library program, as individuals participate when and where they feel comfortable. There is no registration and people can choose what they want to work on and for how long. They can work with a trainer or on their own in an environment that does not feel like a classroom.

– Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian

PREPARING MEALS

We visited the Community Kitchen weekly and got to know the regulars—about eight people who gathered each week to prepare and eat a meal together. We were there to chat, make and eat the daily meal with the group, clean up, and answer questions about library cards, fines, and borrowing. We brought cookbooks to browse. One member of the group was an avid library user who encouraged friends to sign up for cards and visit the library. The Kitchen was also the home of a CAP (Community Access Program) site, but only one member of the group used it.

Several members of the group got to know us so well that they began to visit us at the computer lab in the library. At first these visits were purely social, as the Kitchen members simply enjoyed chatting with their Working Together Project “friends” at the library. We would take time to chat with them and answer their library and information questions—using a laptop, if possible. Later, we were able to talk more specifically about their library or computer needs.

– Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

3. Collaborate with Community Members to Define Format and Content

You will find that different instruction models will suit different communities. The models used by the Working Together Project are described below. Adapt them to meet the needs of the communities you work with.

ONE-TO-ONE MODELS

Informal Drop-In

Librarians can drop in at community locations to initiate discussions about computer training needs and then set up informal one-to-one training sessions. This approach requires regular visits to community sites in order for people to feel comfortable talking about the kinds of training they might want or require. Building relationships with community members facilitates your ability to understand what skills and proficiencies they need most.

This technique depends on several factors:

- **Finding out about individual needs.** People should not be expected to learn to use computers for the sake of learning ICT skills. Instead, they should learn these skills to answer a question or create something valuable for themselves.
- **Having computers become a part of the everyday environment at the community site.** Eventually people become comfortable seeing and using computers in the sites they frequent, whether that is a clubhouse, a community kitchen, a food bank, or some other community location.
- **Allowing ready access to the computer as needed.** There should not be any need to register for a class or sign up and wait before touching the computer.
- **Ensuring staff maintain a low-key and low-tech attitude.** Use computers simply as a tool to answer a question or to complete a task.
- **Showing rather than telling.** Cultivate an attitude that suggests a person does not need a lot of knowledge before touching a computer.
- **Supporting the learner to be ready and willing.** No one should be pressured to take computer classes or to visit the library. If you have established relationships with people, they will feel comfortable letting library staff know when they are ready to learn.

take it easy



! THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE ILLUSTRATES THE INFORMAL DROP-IN APPROACH FOR INDIVIDUAL TRAINING. NOTICE HOW THE INITIATION, PACE, CONTENT, AND AMOUNT OF INSTRUCTION WAS COMPLETELY DETERMINED BY EACH LEARNER.

GRADUAL INTRODUCTION

At Guy Richmond Place, a halfway house for federal parolees, residents demonstrated a wide range of interest and previous experience with computers, from absolute zero to being skilled beyond anything I could ever teach them. Those who were already competent were glad to find out that free Internet was available at the library. Those with no previous experience would progress through various stages in training.

First, their interest and willingness had to be established. This could take anywhere from a few minutes to many months. They would see me at the house, using either my laptop or the residents' computer, and be introduced to rudimentary use of the keyboard and mouse, usually via a game. When these basics were in place, the next step was one-to-one introduction to the Internet at the library. We would meet at the neighbourhood branch library after I called to ensure I would have an Internet station available. I introduced the residents to the branch public service staff so they would feel welcome returning to the branch on their own to practice. Content of the sessions was completely determined by the interests of the resident. For one learner interested in Buddhism, we learned to surf the web and follow links on that topic. When another learner wanted information on vitamins for bodybuilding, we used that as our focus. In most cases, I already knew what a given learner's interests were because of previous conversations when we were hanging out at the halfway house. In all cases, they knew more about the subject matter than I did.

I would offer these one-to-one sessions as often as needed, but typically after 2 or 3 sessions the resident was comfortable and would just ask questions as they arose. A few residents became interested in developing their skills even further and enrolled in mainstream group courses at the Central library. I would offer to make the phone call to register on behalf of the residents, if they preferred, as they weren't sure what kinds of questions they would be asked.

Without these gradual and personalised stages of introduction to both computers and the library, there is extremely little chance that any of these people would have acquired skills that let them go on to enrol in the regular library ICT training programs.

– Stephanie Kripps, Community Development Librarian

Scheduled Computer Learning

In this model, the learner identifies the place where they want to have the class, the pace of the class, and the topics to be covered. Sessions continue until the learner decides it is time to move on to other classes or simply wants to stop. You might find that some participants have difficulty keeping scheduled appointments. It is important to remain accepting of this and not to become critical or dismissive toward learners who do not attend every scheduled session. Missing sessions is not typically an indication of disinterest. It can often be a symptom of low self-confidence or some other life issue completely unrelated to the class.

For one-to-one computer training, the tutor spent time with learners to find out about their computer experience and what each of them wanted to accomplish. This allowed learners to verbalise their interests and possible fears and to help them discuss how to approach the training, including frequency, time and location.

– Mary Saso, Community Development Librarian



THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE DEMONSTRATES THE PROCESS THAT ONE PROJECT SITE USED TO DEVELOP LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS. NOTE THAT THE APPROACH INVOLVES AN INTAKE SESSION PRIOR TO SCHEDULING THE FIRST COMPUTER TRAINING SESSION. THIS APPROACH IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER EXAMPLES IN THIS TOOL, WHICH INSTEAD STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING PARTICIPANTS ACCESS COMPUTERS IMMEDIATELY. THIS DIFFERENCE UNDERSCORES THE VALUE OF HAVING PARTICIPANTS GUIDE THE APPROACH AND THE PROCESS.

LEARNING ABOUT THE LEARNERS

We developed an intake procedure for new learners. We had each learner meet with us individually to review:

- *what they wanted to learn;*
- *why they wanted to learn it (work, personal, family);*
- *their previous experience;*
- *their scheduling needs;*
- *their location preferences;*
- *their individual challenges (bad back, low vision, ESL);*
- *their other commitments, including registration in other programs;*
- *their previous interest in or use of the library; and*
- *if they would like a library card or a library tour.*

We made notes during this conversation and then booked the first computer session for another time. We found that it put people at ease to meet and chat with the instructor. In addition, they were more likely to look forward to the lesson and to show up when they knew the instructor. We discovered it was best to talk to people casually first, rather than ask these questions outright.

The intake procedure helped us identify learning styles and confidence levels. We were less likely to be surprised by hidden disabilities, and could plan to accommodate various needs. We could also make referrals to other computer learning programs (such as a local program that teaches assistive technologies for people with learning disabilities) as appropriate.

– Darla Muzzerall, Community Development Librarian

do it together



GROUP TRAINING MODEL

The group training model uses the same approach as one-to-one training, keeping the focus on the needs and preferences of the individuals within the group. When asked to provide a training class, librarians using this model responded to requests by:

- asking each individual about their computer experience;
- asking what each person would like to learn and why (personal, family, work);
- speaking with people more privately if they do not identify their needs to the group;
- working with the group and the staff at the site to schedule the session;
- deciding whether the session should be hands-on or presentation-style; and
- developing a simple lesson plan that touches on all the areas identified.

The purpose of this technique is to demystify computers and create a feeling of camaraderie in learning together. This technique works well when there is a cohesive group, such as a young mothers group, a newcomers group learning English as a second language, or perhaps a group of adults meeting to discuss a shared illness or condition.

Being aware of and responsive to people's various learning styles and challenges is important in this model. Many participants who engage with this type of instruction will have had opportunities to attend traditional instruction programs, either from the library or another service provider, but have not been comfortable doing so. What makes this model successful is your ability to be flexible, to build relationships with participants, and to provide instruction that responds to the physical, emotional, and social needs of the participants.

4. Provide Instruction with Flexibility

Working in the community, especially with socially excluded community members, means being prepared for a wide range of factors. There are no set rules or proven solutions for the challenges that libraries, library staff, and diverse community members face when they seek to engage one another. However, staff should consistently avoid making assumptions about people, take as much time as possible to get to know people, and understand people's expectations and limitations as they define them.

You may face some challenges around being flexible and adapting to community needs. In other cases, challenges might be around finding appropriate community space or balancing the expectations of service providers with the needs expressed by community members.

One Project librarian, for example, noted that in her community it can be important to get learners on the computer as soon as possible, so that they leave the first session feeling a sense of accomplishment. Another librarian in a different community described how the first session was ideally spent solely on intake and assessment (see the *Learning about our learners* example above). Expect such differences to occur—perhaps even within the same training session—and remain open to allowing community members to guide the nature and pace of instruction

It is very important to continually ask the participants for feedback regarding the training. Offer them a variety of ways to communicate—verbally as a group, verbally one-to-one, written evaluations, or via service providers. Participants must feel comfortable giving us feedback regarding content, delivery, and length, so that we can adjust the training accordingly. The community residents are, above all, the most important part of the training. Gathering feedback on a regular basis is the only way to make sure that our training is in fact community-led and being tailored directly to the participants' needs.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod, Community Development Librarian

As in many sites, participants with many levels of skill met in the same session. The service provider did not have the time or the space to divide the group by skill level. This would also have created a stigma about being in a lower skills group. We arranged with the service provider to create hands-on projects for the participants to be involved in. For example, one day, they had been talking about their life stories in the morning. In the afternoon, we had an ICT class and encouraged the participants to type up their life stories in the form of a list of events. Through this, they learned simple formatting of a word-processing document, as well as how to save and retrieve files. Those with more computer experience were able to create more detailed lists with more formatting features. All participants finished with a Life List they were proud of.

– Darla Muzzerall,
Community Development Librarian

5. Evaluate Planning Process and Program

Evaluation in the Working Together Project emphasises using qualitative methods collaboratively with community members. The objective is to determine the results of the training and whether the training met their needs and was delivered effectively. Please read *Service Evaluation* in *Part III* of the Toolkit for more information.

In short, there are several evaluation indicators that instructors or librarians can pay close attention to:

- **Relevance.** Did participants return to learn more skills?
- **Language.** Can participants articulate their computer needs better? For example, have they progressed from general questions such as “I want to learn email,” to specific questions such as “What should I put in the subject line of my email?”
- **Self-Confidence.** Can participants make the transition from using a computer in class to using a public computer independently in the library?
- **Inclusiveness.** Did participants meet library staff? Did they engage in conversations with staff about themselves and their needs? Did they obtain and use a library card?

one more page



! HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ONE PROJECT SITE EVALUATED ITS ICT TRAINING.

USING SKILLS LEARNED

After a group of participants completed their work placement, we carried out an evaluation of the ICT training and asked how the things they learned were incorporated into their work and personal lives. We found that many of the ICT skills they developed were not utilised at work, but were used at home or at the library to conduct personal computer activities. Based on their feedback, we included additional computer programs in our next classes so that the classes delivered the computer skills people wanted for their personal lives.

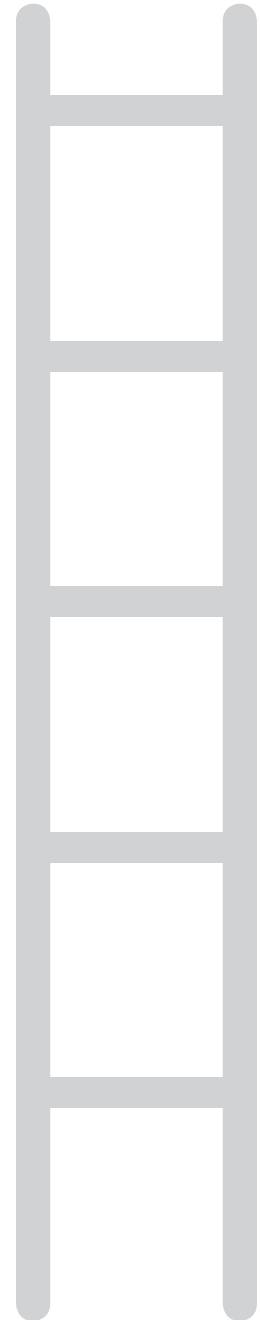
- Ken Williment,
Community
Development
Librarian

Keep In Mind

There are several things to be aware of that can add to the success of your program:

- Learners need to feel comfortable. It is important that there is time to develop a relaxed and secure atmosphere in the learning space.
- Lessons and practice activities need to fit the literacy levels of the group so that the learner experiences success, not frustration.
- Attendance or concentration may be irregular due to physical, mental, or social factors. Be flexible and accepting.
- Anticipate the possibility of drop-ins, late arrivals, and early departures.
- If some students are parents who cannot afford childcare, incorporate children into the session.
- Community spaces may not have the same resources as libraries' computer labs. Requirements such as Internet access or sufficient electrical outlets may not be available. Visit the training site in advance of your class to see what is in place and what is needed. Be prepared to adapt lessons to the conditions that exist.

Computer training can have different purposes for different individuals: success for one person may involve learning a specific program to improve employment prospects, while for another it may simply involve conquering their anxieties about computers. Regardless of the differences, each of these purposes has a tangible benefit for the participant. Avoid the temptation to focus on "necessary" computer skills and instead find ways for community members to access the skills they want in ways that are immediately applicable to their needs.



this way up

Tool 7

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 1. Establish Relationship in the Community
 2. Gauge Interest
 3. Assess Needs with the Community
 4. Critique Your Collection
 5. Select and Acquire Materials
 6. Evaluate Continuously
 7. Celebrate
 8. Continue to Involve Your Community
- Internal Change

Collaborative collection development may ultimately be one of the best ways to ensure that community members see themselves reflected in the library. When people actually choose items that will go in the collection, they get to see themselves reflected on the shelf. They get to say, "I chose that item for the library. It's my library."

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Definition

Collection development within the Community-Led Service Planning Model is simply the application of the service model to the collection development process. Collection development in this context gives community members the lead in building collections that reflect their needs and interests. It engages the community collaboratively in every step of the process, from needs identification, through materials selection, to evaluation and beyond.

Rationale

Librarians work to develop collections that are both a reflection of community needs and an unbiased, comprehensive representation of a given subject. Yet across the country, the Working Together Project staff heard many times that socially excluded community members do not see themselves reflected in their libraries' collections.

Libraries have relied on a number of approaches to build collections, from analysis of community demographics to collection use analysis and community surveys. These approaches have been most successful at understanding the needs of active library users and those who are included in mainstream society. To build collections that meet the needs of socially excluded communities, libraries must adopt new approaches—approaches that position the community members as the experts in understanding their needs.

Application

The following steps outline one of the ways a community-led collection development process works. Once you have had a bit of practice in the area, discuss with your colleagues other ideas that could work in your community. Always spend time reflecting on what worked well and what did not.

1. Establish Relationships in the Community

In order to develop collections with the community, it is important to establish relationships with community members directly. *Tool 3: Relationship Building* and *Tool 4: Partnerships* will give you ideas of how to do this.

2. Gauge Interest

Your casual discussions with community members will reveal many of their needs and interests. When it seems appropriate, you can ask them whether they would be interested in participating in collection development. For example, a group of teens discussing astrology might be interested in selecting materials in this area. Ask them if they would like to help the library buy astrology books. It may take some community members a while to warm to this idea, and others may simply not be interested. You may need to introduce the idea gradually or gauge interest over a period of time as your relationships deepen.

3. Assess Needs with the Community

If the interest is there, begin discussing community members' collection needs more formally. Your method will depend on the community members with whom you are working. They may want to be involved in casual discussions about the collection or they may want to hold one or more organised meetings. Let the group decide how to discuss collection development and what issues to explore. Some group members may want to jump right into selecting materials. Others may begin by discussing factors that impact the collection's relevance to themselves, including how the collection is accessed or how it is displayed. Collaborative collection development is meant to be an exploratory process where community members consider any and all possibilities, regardless of library limitations. Encourage community members to participate and share ideas, but be careful not to create the impression that the library is promising to act on every suggestion that is made.

Organising spaces and times for groups to meet can be challenging. If you are already meeting a group through a service provider, then the service provider's space may be easily available and the best choice. If not, other locations will have to be considered and discussed. Consider spaces such as neighbourhood church basements, housing complex meeting rooms, community centres, playing fields, or an inexpensive café.



THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE DEMONSTRATES HOW ONE PROJECT LIBRARIAN ADAPTED THE NEEDS IDENTIFICATION PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

Some of the employment resources offered at the larger area branches were identified by the community as being important, even critical, for them to access at the local branch. Unfortunately, some of the smaller neighbourhood branches do not get all the items they may need and so rely on referrals to larger downtown branches to meet community needs. In the community I worked with, many of the people who needed material housed at other branches found it difficult to visit the larger branches, which were outside the neighbourhood. Our distribution system further complicated the community's ability to access the employment resources they wanted and needed.

In order to build a local collection that reflected the community's needs, as well as acknowledge that many community members are uncomfortable leaving the neighbourhood, we arranged further consultation and collaboration with the community.

A focus group was held to discuss newcomers' needs for employment-related materials. Focus group participants identified some collection needs and discussed how difficult it is for people to wait for a hold to come in when actively looking for work. Focus group participants also stated that they needed to borrow the materials, so they were not as apt to use the non-circulating reference library material.

We are now preparing a report based on the results of these focus groups. It will include recommendations to change purchasing patterns for employment materials at the two branches and to have "holds exempt" circulating copies. We anticipate collaborating further with community members to identify and select materials covering specific occupations and professions that interest them.

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

4. Critique Your Collection

Getting feedback on your existing collection can occur either before or after assessing needs. Gaining feedback before can limit community members' ability to explore their needs fully, as they might find it harder to imagine possibilities beyond the existing collection. Other community members may feel more confident exploring their collection needs if they have some context, so they may prefer to critique the collection beforehand. Gaining feedback from community members does not have to be a formal process. For example, community members might provide critiques casually in conversation.

Assessing the collection in a more structured way will depend on the group with whom you are working. If community members are interested in visiting the branch as a group, you can arrange a branch tour where they can see the collection on the shelf. They can then critique other aspects of the collection, such as how it is displayed or how easy it is to find an item. Some groups may be hesitant to conduct such a visit when the branch is open, so you may want to arrange a visit when the branch is closed.

Not all groups will want or be able to visit the branch. You can bring materials representative of the collection with you when visiting service providers or community groups and critique them in that context, or you can hold an informal focus group to do this in a more structured way. It is not necessary for a group to see the whole collection, as it is hard to imagine any group that would have the stamina to look through every item in a collection. Showing them a sampling should give them what they need in order to form a working impression of your collection. In addition to the ideas outlined here, try borrowing ideas from *Tool 3: Relationship Building* as a way of soliciting the group's feedback.

5. Select and Acquire Materials

Selecting and acquiring materials can be done a number of ways, depending on how community members want to do it and the resources you have. Some community members might only want to go so far as making suggestions, while others might enjoy doing everything including purchasing the items. There are ways to address these differences, and you may need to use several approaches with the same group.

- Look through catalogues together and select items for purchase.
- Go on shopping trips. Take a group to a store to select and purchase items for the collection.
- Go on online shopping trips. Use a website like Amazon to generate a list of items to purchase.
- If community members are unsure of specific titles they want, discuss subjects and formats that interested them, and then return with a list of suggestions to consider.
- Have group members talk to people they know to generate other suggestions.
- Ask community members if there are other ways they would like to select materials.

Your role in community-led collection development is to facilitate the process of building collections that are relevant to and representative of the community. This involves everything from providing catalogues to helping community members understand the library philosophy and collection development theory that informs selection activities.



6. Evaluate Continuously

Evaluation in the Community-Led Service Planning Model is ongoing and involves evaluating and altering the process as the need arises. Through every step of the collection development process, ask participants if the process is working for them. If it is not, adjust the process and activities according to their suggestions.

7. Celebrate

Once materials have been selected and purchased, determine with community members how to acknowledge the achievement. This is an opportunity to discuss the collection and the entire process of building it. It is also an opportunity for the library to formally recognise the benefits of collaborative partnerships with the community.


Discuss a celebration with your community members.

- Plan an event where participants open the boxes of items they have selected, view the new collection, and discuss whether or not the materials meet their expectations.
- Organise an unveiling at the branch once the collection is on the shelves. Like the branch tours, this event could be held during closed hours, if this works best for the group. The group should also have a chance to discuss whether or not the materials meet their expectations.
- Hold an event where branch staff come to a community space to display some of the items purchased. This strengthens the link between community members and the material and demonstrates that library materials are meant to be in the community.

8. Continue to Involve Your Community

As with collections, community involvement is not static. One of the aims of community-led service planning is to establish and maintain meaningful, ongoing connections between a community and its library. Activities like collaborative collection development build relationships that last beyond the activity itself. Explore how else the community members you are working with might want to be involved with the library.

- Does the group want to develop a program to highlight the collection they have built?
- Are they interested in planning a program in some other area?
- Do they want to be involved in other collection development initiatives?
- Are there other aspects of the library that interest them, such as policy development or facilities planning that they would like to participate in?

 THE FOLLOWING PAGE HAS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW COMMUNITIES HAVE INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIONS.

flip it over 

ABORIGINAL COLLECTION

A private donor approached the library offering a substantial grant to expand the Aboriginal collection at the Working Together Project's site branch.

To make the collection development process a community-led one, I began by going to Aboriginal groups in the community and asking questions. The questions I asked first did not address the collection, but rather if and how community members wanted to be involved. It was important to begin by placing control of the process in the community's hands, so that it could reflect their ways of working, and not the library's. It was impossible to avoid getting suggestions for the collection anyway. Some people were so interested in the idea that they wanted to start building a collection right away.

Nonetheless, I did hear a lot about how to structure the process. In order to have full community support, several people said it was essential for me to inform elders in the three local bands of what the library was doing. Others suggested specific events or meetings I could attend in order to connect with the community. Still others suggested that holding community forums would be the best way to involve the community. I also heard about considerations that I might not have thought of otherwise. For example, Aboriginal communities may not think of themselves in the same geographic terms by which our library systems are bound.

I met several people who were interested in setting up a community forum, and I have followed up on the suggestions community members have made so far. For example, I contacted the offices of the three bands mentioned earlier.

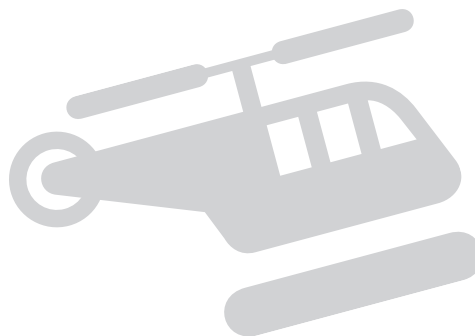
This is an ongoing project. The next step will be to hold one or more community forums, where the focus will be on the community controlling the process of building this collection—not just the items in the collection, but also the collection's purpose and scope.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

Internal Change

Some staff members might initially be resistant to involving the community in collection development. They may identify collection development with their expertise as librarians and be reluctant to surrender that expertise. Some librarians may feel that community members do not have the necessary grounding in library philosophy and so cannot make appropriate material selections. Some may also suggest that the quality of the collection will be degraded if non-professionals select materials. Successful community-led collection development begins with library staff understanding the importance of community involvement in library activities.

Initiating community-led collection development practices may mean you need to challenge existing selection practices. Some libraries have inflexible ordering systems that cannot immediately be adapted to community-led collection development. Other systems may have selection processes that could be immediately modified to allow for community participation. Being thoughtful, creative, and willing to change will ensure that your community's voice is central to your collections. This, in turn, ensures that your library's collection is inclusive of the whole community's needs and wants.



hang on!

Tool 8

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
 - Equity and Access
 - Language and Perception
 - Personal Development

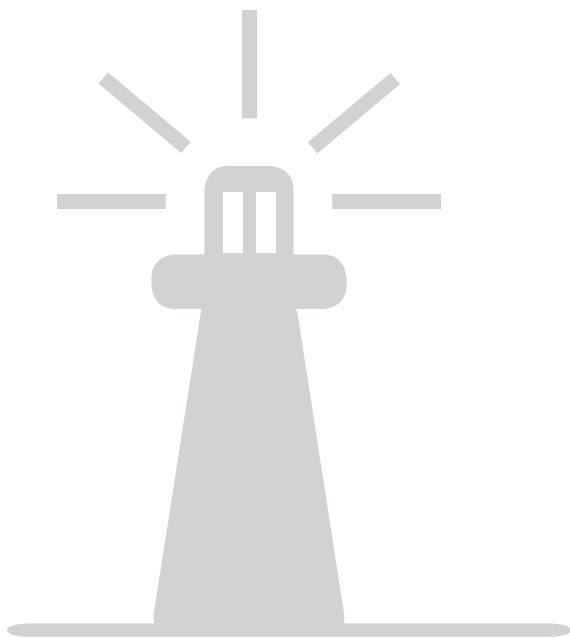
We have to create settings that allow staff to express their thoughts on the community and to recognise their own biases when working with the community.

– Tracey Jones, Supervisor

Definition

Across the country, millions of people enter public libraries and interact with staff each year. People may be looking for a DVD, using the Internet, asking for directions to the washroom, researching a topic, signing out a book, managing their member account, or registering for a new library card. “Customer Service” is the term for how staff members interact with the public to help successfully complete these quests and activities. Customer service includes those interactions between library staff and library users that explain, describe, and clarify the library system.

In a community-led approach, customer service focuses on understanding the unique needs of community groups and individuals and being aware of and sensitive to the barriers they face when attempting to access library services. Community-led customer service acknowledges that diverse communities require a multiplicity of approaches in order to ensure a welcoming, comfortable, and inclusive library.



Rationale

Most of us find basic customer service interactions to be standard and innocuous. When we ourselves are placed in similar situations, we have the self-confidence to speak up when we feel there has been an injustice or to request special consideration if there have been unusual circumstances. We consider such interactions familiar and normal. As a result, it may not seem significant to us if a person owes a fine or has lost a book. We state the fee and patrons pay what they owe. If we ask for address identification to open an account, we think people will understand that the requirement is necessary and is about protecting the collection. As staff, we have policy and experience to support our decisions.

But these types of interactions are not always seen as familiar or normal to socially excluded community members. Many people have significantly reduced economic and social resiliency. Whether real or perceived, a single negative interaction with staff is enough to significantly impact a community member's experience with the library and their perception of being welcome. Community members associated with the Working Together Project frequently indicated that a single negative interaction was enough to keep them away from the library for years. Such experiences also impacted how they described the library to their peers.

The most inclusive policy can be enacted in a manner that is inconsistent or alienating to some patrons. By paying attention to the way we communicate and interact with members of the public, either in branches and on the phone, we can help eliminate these barriers. Ultimately, we can only change policies and operations if we change the way we think about our services, our community members, and our role in meeting their needs.

You will find this Tool most useful if you have read the discussion *Systemic Barriers* earlier in this Toolkit.

Application

This section describes different ways of thinking about and responding to typical day-to-day library interactions. It first addresses the key concepts of equity and access and provides examples of what this looks like in everyday situations. The *Language and Perception* discussion illuminates ways that our traditional thinking, word choices, and standard procedures can become more inclusive and patron-centred. The *Personal Development* section outlines skills that help us provide equitable service.

Equity and Access

Understanding the principle that “same and consistent” treatment does not result in equitable access to library service is key to developing a customer service model that meets the needs of all people. The simplest example concerns fines. Library staff need to move away from feeling that “it is not fair” to waive fines for socially excluded community members because we do not waive fines for everyone else. By waiving or eliminating fines, we can often make the library more accessible to people living in poverty. Enforcing fines for this population frequently excludes them from the library completely. Consistently applying policy in support of equitable access to information—not consistently applying a set of rules—creates an equitable library.

Language and Perception

Language tells the community and us a lot about how we perceive ourselves as library workers and how we perceive the community. We are often careless in our adoption of language, accepting traditional terminology as appropriate without questioning the subtle impacts on our culture and policies. Many staff may believe our choice of words is harmless or a minor issue, but consider the effective long-term impact that gender-neutral language has had on our consciousness. We now automatically use chair instead of chairman, for example, and no longer hear the once-familiar phrases “male nurse” or “lady doctor.”

Within the Project, we identified the terms below as some of the problematic ones used within libraries.

- Front line
- Problem patron
- Claims returned
- Probation
- Delinquent borrower

work with people



Make an effort to refrain from describing staff as being “on the front line” or “in the trenches.” These phrases are military terms in which we linguistically position ourselves as fighters against the public and characterise our public interactions as battles. Instead, use phrases that reflect the respect you have for the public and the positive relationship you are trying to foster between staff and the community. The usual phrase on job descriptions is simply “public service staff.”

Libraries have also adopted terms normally associated with crime and punishment. New borrowers are “on probation” for the first few months and “delinquent” borrowers have long-term outstanding fines.

Try discussing these among your colleagues and see if you can identify other inappropriate terms within your system.

THE “PROBLEM PATRON”

The use of this phrase is accepted and pervasive in library systems. We see the term written in our policy and procedure manuals and use it when describing certain members of the public.

“Problem patron” is a catchall phrase. This label stigmatises people who act in ways that many of us believe are inappropriate. However, people’s lives are complex. There can be numerous reasonable explanations for their behaviour. By engaging with the individual in an open-minded manner, we may discover that their behaviour is acceptable once we understand its context.

We sometimes find ourselves challenged to communicate with a patron who may be expressing displeasure with the library or who may become increasingly agitated by our attempts to explain a policy and discuss library-acceptable solutions. Libraries have patrons whose behaviour or attitude staff find offensive or challenging to understand and manage. We label them as our “regular problem patrons” and hope that they go away without too much bother. In this way, we place the problem on the patron. We effectively relinquish any sense of personal or organisational responsibility to address their needs or work with them to find a solution.

The Working Together Project urges libraries to rephrase and reconceptualise the “problem patron” in our institutions. We also need to ensure that this phrase is eradicated from courses in library schools.

However, acknowledging and changing our concept of the “problem patron” must go beyond simply learning to work through uncomfortable situations or conflict. We must reposition ourselves as partners with every patron who walks in the door. If they have a problem with the library, it is our job to work with them to find a solution to it.

We will require support as we work to change the way in which we have traditionally interacted with the community. It is a major shift in both thought and behaviour to move from a place where policy is applied the same across all users—by the book—to a model in which we seek to understand the unique circumstances of each community member’s life before interpreting policy.



HERE IS ONE EXAMPLE OF AN OPEN-MINDED, RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING APPROACH TO A "PROBLEM PATRON."

LISTENING AND CONNECTING

A patron came frequently to the Mount Pleasant branch and complained about the noise level. She especially couldn't concentrate with the loud children's programs going on. Her frequent complaining resulted in some unpleasant "problem patron" interactions with the staff. One staff member wanted the patron banned from the branch and eventually the patron herself called administration.

As the acting branch head at the time, I abandoned the "problem patron" mindset and in fact abandoned every traditional library approach, which would have included handing the woman a list of other community places she could go to instead. I wanted to connect with her until I better understood the situation. Then we could decide together what to do.

When I first introduced myself to her, the patron's immediate response was, "I know what you're going to say to me." But I communicated my desire to keep her as a patron, to somehow make her feel welcome despite her recent altercations with staff. I told her, "We need you to keep coming to this branch, so that your friends and neighbours and others in the community will also feel they will be welcome here. Tell me what's going on and let's see what we can do."

The patron was a recent immigrant from Iraq, living in a small apartment with her mother and her six-year-old daughter, supporting them both on income assistance. Her husband was missing in Iraq. Under these conditions, she was trying to study for her license to practice medicine in BC, as she had been a fully qualified doctor in Iraq. It was impossible for her to study in the cramped quarters at home.

In her culture, libraries were places of refuge and higher learning. The liveliness of the Mount Pleasant branch was shocking to her. But she listened and understood when I, in turn, explained that in order to cultivate and maintain children's love of literacy and learning, we needed to have exuberant children's programs. We needed the children to come to the branch and needed her to come, too. She and I spoke at some length about these and other things.

This patron was not a "problem" though clearly she had problems in her life. Having a library staff member listen to her story rather than telling her to leave the library was a complete reversal of what she had learned to expect from the library. Being open and willing to listen was enough for her. She kept coming to the library and, a few weeks later, she also brought her daughter in for her first-ever library visit.

- Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

the essentials



Personal Development

As a result of Project librarians working in the community, the Project identified a set of soft skills that enhances staff's ability to work successfully with socially excluded communities to plan services and to address systemic barriers in our libraries. Some of these skills can be learned through training and others must be consciously and personally cultivated. The Project identified the following skills as being essential to this work:

- Critical thinking and self awareness,
- Humility,
- Contextual and active listening,
- Empathy,
- Confidence,
- Curiosity,
- Open-minded attitude, and
- Stress management.

! EACH OF THESE IS EXPLORED IN MORE DETAIL BELOW.

CRITICAL THINKING AND SELF AWARENESS

In the context of the Community-Led Service Planning Model, critical thinking means understanding, assessing, and, where necessary, changing library policies and methods so they are more responsive to the community's needs and wants. At the same time, in order to effectively assess our institutions, we need to continuously examine ourselves. We all have cultural beliefs, and we all make assumptions about people. It is simply one of the ways we organise information.

Be aware of your own cultural beliefs and assumptions and understand how these may affect both relationship building in the community and customer service in the library. In many cases, our beliefs can reinforce barriers. It is important to be aware of how this can happen. Evaluate your work by asking yourself, "How might that have come across? What is my library system saying to socially excluded communities when we enact this policy?"

Critical thinking and self-reflection allow for the re-evaluation of long-held library policies and traditions and allow us to assess the impact and relevance of our work.





HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW SELF-REFLECTION CAN HELP IDENTIFY PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS AND BIASES.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SHELTER

I had been dropping in at the shelter in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood for a couple of weeks before I put up a sign inviting people to come and have tea and cookies with me. A small group of people turned up, drawn by the promise of food. I talked about the neighbourhood with them and then explained that I was interested in knowing what they thought about the library. People mostly talked about their experiences with libraries when they were young. I asked what people might like from the library. One man said that he thought the library should give free courses in astronomy. Another person suggested that the library do astrology courses as well. Finally, someone else suggested that the library buy a telescope.

This was a significant discussion for me and revealed many of the biases and prejudices I had brought to the work. I had expected people to talk about the importance of offering free coffee at the library or to discuss the dismal lack of wet weather beds in the community and ask what the library could do about that. I thought I would hear about all the issues that concerned me about homeless people in the community. After I left the shelter, I realised that the people I talked with had asked for things from the library that were relevant to their lives. They were interested in the night sky, astronomy, astrology and telescopes because they often slept outside and so spent significant amounts of time looking at the stars.

After this experience, I realised I had assumed that my own values and ideas about what was important for homeless people would be the same as the values and ideas they had about themselves. It was at this point that I began to understand what treating people equally meant. Their ideas were as important as mine and, as a librarian, my job was to respond to people's needs rather than tell them what they needed.

- Annette DeFaveri, Community Development Librarian

Critical thinking is not negative thinking or an indication of a negative attitude. Critical thinking, particularly when it involves presenting alternative and innovative ways to reconsider a situation, is a positive and reflective learning experience. Critical thinking lets us contribute to the growth of our libraries.

- Randy Gatley,
Community
Development
Librarian

we're all equals



HUMILITY

Leaving behind the “expert” mentality and approaching the community on an equitable level will help the community to see us as equals. Acknowledging that community members are the experts on their own needs is the first step in this approach. Our position is that of a learner—working with the community to discover how the library might meet community needs.

It takes humility to let go of one’s self-identity as an expert. It also takes the self-confidence to realise that this is not a reflection on one’s professionalism. If anything, it speaks positively to that attribute.

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

CONTEXTUAL AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening is one of the key skills for library work. Because of the emphasis on hearing what the community is saying about relevant library services and barriers to library use, listening is particularly important when working within a Community-Led Service Planning Model.

Contextual Listening

We all know that it is possible to hear what people are saying without understanding what they mean. Listening for the nuance and subtleties of responses and reactions and then applying context to what is heard can provide depth to our understanding.

 HERE ARE TWO EXAMPLES THAT ILLUSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUAL LISTENING.

THE NEED BEHIND THE NEED

At one Project site, single parents stated that they would really appreciate field trips to other parts of the city. Some staff wondered if providing field trips was appropriate for the library to do. It is important, though, not to automatically disregard the parents’ suggestion and say, “Sorry, the library can’t do this. What else do you need that the library can do?”

If we apply context, and consider why we are being asked to provide certain things, we might begin to hear that these parents feel trapped in the community, that they are lacking the means to explore the city, and that they may not feel confident exploring the city on their own. As single parents, they may not have the resources to consider a trip to a museum or art gallery or a downtown park. If we listen to what people tell us, in the larger context of their lives, their needs and their wants, we can better understand what they may need from the library. In this case, it was important to realize that the parents felt isolated in their community and in their homes with their young children. What they wanted was a chance to socialize with other community members and a chance to do something outside their homes. They expressed this desire by suggesting field trips.

By listening and probing for the reasons behind suggestions, we are able to work with community groups to find ways for libraries to meet community needs within the library context.

– Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator

ALL-NIGHT ARCADES

A resident at Guy Richmond Place was exclaiming about the new (to him) proliferation of all-night video arcades since he was released from prison. "All those kids, young teens, I see them in there playing games 24/7!" I replied, "That would really worry me, to think how many kids are spending so much of their time playing video games. When are they playing sports or keeping up with homework?" This response arose from my own context and biases, without reflection and completely ignorant of the resident's context. Fortunately, that was not my first or second conversation with this resident and I already had a decent rapport built up with him. He explained to me, "But at least the parents know where to find their kids. They're off the streets. If I'd had all-night places like that to go to when I was a teen, maybe I wouldn't have ended up in prison."

This conversation had a powerful impact on my awareness of my personal biases and the importance of context. I probably learned more about listening in those 30 seconds than in all my previous training courses combined.

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

Active Listening

Active listening skills can help us understand the context of what is being said by community members. There is already a substantial body of literature on active listening. Here are some key points:

- Use active listening skills to help move away from the role of the expert. The focus of active listening is the same as being a learner: we are trying to receive information and build understanding.
- Always reflect back to the listener—repeat or rephrase what you heard—because assumptions and biases may shade our understanding of what is being said.
- Probe and clarify to understand what people are trying to tell you.
- Do not think ahead. Keep an open mind and try not to prepare your next remark. This can distract you from what is being said.
- Let community members guide the conversation to ensure that it focuses on issues that are important to them.
- Provide time for people to finish describing their thoughts. A few seconds of silence, such as counting to three in your head after the person finishes talking, makes sure they are done.

EMPATHY

Empathy can help us see the library through the community's eyes and experiences. Empathy involves taking a perspective different from our own, imagining how an interaction might be felt or interpreted by someone else, and being able to imagine how another person's life circumstances impact their ability to access library services. Empathy lets us transcend our assumptions about the community and what we usually believe to be appropriate.

be strong



CONFIDENCE

Your confidence will increase as you develop a solid understanding of community-based library work. The more you think and work outside the traditional library model, the more comfortable and self-confident you will become in applying equitable service principles.

CURIOSITY

Being genuinely curious about the lives of community members and the conditions in the community helps build valuable insight into how the library can meet community needs. Developing a sense of curiosity helps you move past the expected norms or status quo of your institution and culture and helps reinforce your role as a learner.

OPEN-MINDED ATTITUDE

Being open to social, cultural, economic, political, or any other differences in the community is essential when working with diverse community members. Practice your ability to remain open-minded when meeting people who may be extremely different from you.

A non-judgmental attitude can help us move away from imposing traditionally rigid library procedures or imposing western culture's traditions and values on community members. It can help us approach situations without any expectation of what should or should not happen.

Cultivating an open and respectful attitude enhances our empathy, curiosity, and ability to act inclusively. This, in turn, helps us build relationships in communities that can contribute to our understanding of communities. Our inclusive attitude demonstrates to community members that the library is prepared to hear from them and to learn from them.

My thorough and confident knowledge of the library system was instrumental in establishing my credibility in the community. Initially, I think it may have been my single greatest asset. If a community member had a question—any question—I knew how the library could respond to that need or exactly whom to call in order to clarify options or answers. I made it a practice to call whomever I needed to, right on the spot, and often satisfied the person's question within minutes or even seconds.

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Working with socially excluded people will expose you to many distressing stories and circumstances in the community. The Project staff worked with people who were the victims of abuse, prejudice, and poverty, and who experienced mental illness, addiction, and physical limitations. It was often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to remain dispassionate or unemotional in such situations.

Additionally, working to change the library to reflect community needs and wants can be a complicated endeavour that may become frustrating and exhausting.

Monitor yourself and know when you are feeling the emotional strain of the work. Talk to your supervisor or an employee assistance counsellor if you are having difficulty coping with stress. If you supervise other staff, learn to recognise the signs of stress in others. The *Staff Development* discussion later in the Toolkit explores ideas for supporting staff who are making an effort to develop new skills and new ways of working. Staff members need to know that management will be supportive of working to create accessible and inclusive libraries.

- Be patient. Working with the community can be slow. It is easy to feel a sense of frustration.
- Put events in perspective. One stressful situation does not mean all others will be stressful.
- Recognise your personal capacities and saturation points.
- Debrief with staff after stressful events in the community.
- Consider training in peer counselling for the debriefing process.

Remember the big picture and the role of the public library. When working with socially excluded community members, whether in the branch or in the community, let the over-arching principles of inclusion and accessibility be your guide. This will require that we sometimes override library rules.

When the sights, sounds, and smells of poverty and social exclusion became overwhelming for me, I found talking with people who had done similar community work to be the best therapy. They understood what I was experiencing without a lot of explanations and without needing me to recount details. When it was just about me coping with what I was witnessing in the community, I needed to talk with others who had witnessed similar things.

– Annette DeFaveri,
Community Development Librarian

trust yourself



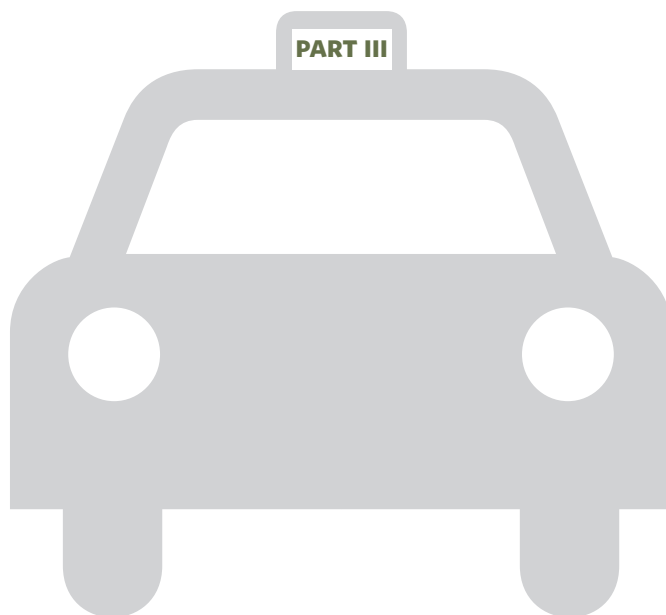
If you are training as a new librarian, it may take a long time to navigate the current library culture. During this process you can be introspective.

Question possible library barriers and consider the types of cultural changes that could be beneficial to the community.

- Ken Williment,
Community
Development
Librarian

While I learned a great deal from having to adapt my attitudes, language, and approach, often on the spot, it was scary and intimidating to be doing this kind of work without any training. Over time, some training, together with my increasing experience and awareness helped build my skills and confidence as I continued working in the community.

- Sonia Pacheco,
Community
Development
Librarian



meet you there!



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Policy Development

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICY

Some of an institution's most important internal documents are its policies. Policies lay the foundation for all community interactions and service planning. Policies are so pervasive because they cover such a wide range of issues and activities, from hiring to collection building to library membership to appropriate behaviour. Policies are also the most direct reflection of a library's vision and values.

Practically, policies provide guidance to staff in the absence of direct governance or management oversight, allowing for operational independence. For the community, policies help convey the operational manifestation of the organisation's vision, mission, and values. Policies colour and influence all community members' interactions with and perceptions of the library.

Policies are developed for a variety of reasons, such as to articulate an organisation's position on contentious issues (e.g., collection diversity), to avoid potential problems or manage risks (e.g., ethical purchasing), or to seek a positive benefit (e.g., whistleblower protection). Policies may be implemented to define the institution's services (e.g., collection development), limit the extent of staff's discretion (e.g., purchasing limits), or to compel user and staff behaviour (e.g., borrowing guidelines or codes of conduct).

Policies often serve as de facto philosophy statements on various issues for staff and patrons. Accordingly, such statements often lay the foundation for an organisation's culture, attitudes, service development priorities, and evaluative techniques.

With the exception of policies that reflect legislative or regulatory requirements such as workplace safety or purchasing policies, an institution's policies are not carved-in-stone, unless the institution has chosen to treat them as such. Public service policies, especially, should serve as governing principles that provide behavioural guidance to staff and patrons as they seek to, respectively, provide or use services.

Policies, however, are often introduced to staff as rules and regulations. Staff are expected to apply policies in a given situation and are often not encouraged or permitted to critically assess both the policy and the situation before taking action. When this happens, policies become blunt instruments instead of a guiding principles. In such cases, policies serve to build a dogmatic and rigid institutional culture.

work in progress

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In public libraries, policy development has traditionally been a collaborative effort by staff and Trustees. While this process ensures an important level of public accountability, it also means that policy development and analysis in public libraries is the purview of well-educated, economically secure and advantaged, self-confident, articulate, and empowered people, who are most likely not experiencing the economic or social hardships faced by many socially excluded community members.

Accordingly, library policies often have unintended consequences that negatively impact socially excluded community members and their ability to interact with and use the library. For example, a library may raise its overdue fines to keep pace with inflation, to match neighbouring library rates, or to increase its income. To public administrators, business people, professionals, homeowners, and other economically advantaged community members, such a strategy appears institutionally and financially appropriate. In such a case, staff and Trustees often cannot imagine that a potential five dollar fine could be prohibitive. However, such a policy may result in a significant barrier for economically disadvantaged residents. Viewed through the lens of a working poor family who is trying to subsist on a poverty level income, five dollars represents a meal, bus fare to work, or necessary medication. The potential of a five dollar fine may result in these parents deciding that the public library is too expensive for them to use.

Staff and Trustees do care deeply about all members of their communities and often believe firmly in the principle of universal access to library services. Accordingly, libraries employ various techniques to address this representation gap in policy development. First, empathy is often applied in such situations as an attempt to bridge the experience gap: staff try to anticipate as many impact permutations as possible. However, there are limits to staff and Trustee's ability to truly predict the impacts of policy on community members with so little economic or personal resilience. The second way libraries attempt to bridge this gap is through consultation. However, as discussed earlier in the description of the Community-Led Service Planning Model, traditional library consultation strategies and tools favour engaged and articulate library users or members of the community who have economic and personal means.

As a result of both inherent systemic bias and the limits of staff and Trustee's abilities to imagine policy impacts on socially excluded residents, library service policies reflect the circumstances and needs of the majority middle class, while the statistical outliers—socially excluded community members—are often unintentionally disadvantaged. Unfortunately, these residents are also often the least able to confidently and successfully engage staff or management in discussions of how policy negatively impacts their ability to use the library. Too often, the cumulative result is that their social exclusion extends to encompass exclusion from the library—a public institution that aspires to provide universal access to information.

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICY

As with other services, the only way to understand the impacts of library policy on socially excluded communities is to discuss with them how an existing or potential policy intersects with their social and economic circumstances and, if there is a negative consequence, engage them in discussions of how the policy could achieve its mandate without excluding community members.

In this sense, libraries treat public service policy development the same as any other service development and the Community-Led Service Planning Model provides a framework for moving forward.

Understandably, public libraries cannot hold extensive and exhaustive consultation every time a policy needs development or analysis. Public libraries are simply not that well funded, nor is it always necessary. However, there are a number of ways to manage our resources while still attempting for better representation in policy development.

I viewed the first step to community inclusion in the policy development process to consist of letting community members know about policies that may impact their use of the library. When meeting with women from the Skills Link program in Halifax, I tried to discuss policies which may affect their ability to use the library, such as those related to fines, late fees, or children. However, I quickly discovered that discussing policies with members of the public, when framing them as policies, can be counterproductive. "Policy" can be something that is frequently a source of stress and stigma in the lives of socially excluded people, and needs to be discussed carefully, even when approaching it from a positive angle.

– Ken Williment, Community Development Librarian

- Work with socially excluded communities to prioritise. Identify which policies have the most profound impact on their ability to use the library and address those first.
- Consider whether a few discussions with various community members would suffice or if a broader discussion is necessary. Ask your community member contacts what they think.
- Ask staff to record and share comments about library policies as they work with socially excluded community members on other services or programs.
- Ask staff to discuss policies with socially excluded community members the next time they are hanging out or working on a service.
- Ask staff to take policy drafts into the community with them and gather suggestions and feedback from the community for potential integration.

No policy is perfect and no matter the rigour applied to the development process, there will be unintended consequences and policy gaps. Policies are living documents that should be under constant scrutiny, both by the library and by the community.

POLICY APPLICATION

Staff's application of policy is just as important as the policy itself.

Policies are often introduced to staff as or understood by staff to be rules and regulations. Staff are expected to apply policies in a given situation and are often not encouraged or permitted to critically assess either the policy and the situation before taking action.

Clearly, some policies require strict adherence. Such policies reflect the institution's legal obligations around managing risk to staff, assets, or the public. Such policies address important facets of the institution's environment: employment equity, harassment, working alone, safety at work, facilities maintenance, and other areas where the library has legal obligations. Deviation from such policies could place the institution, staff, or the public at unacceptable risk.

Often, however, such rigid policy adherence pervades the application of public service policies, which should be intended to provide institutional values-based guidance to staff in their daily work rather than strict operational direction. When applied rigidly, the library's public service policies undermine the library's core service mandate and values, enshrining a dogmatic and rigid institutional culture.

For example, the library may have a policy that the public cannot renew a book more than once. After this renewal, the item must be returned to the shelf. As a general operating principle, this makes sense as it ensures the majority of browsing patrons have a chance at stumbling upon the book. But what happens if a patron with low literacy simply cannot read fast enough to finish the book, even with the additional renewal period? Does the book have to be returned to the shelf for other patrons to access or, given the unique circumstances of the user, could the renewal limit be waived?

In one library where this situation arose, staff (public service and management), insisted that the book be returned to the shelf because that was the library's borrowing policy. "Other users must have a chance to access the book" was the guiding principle they applied. In this case, there was even another edition of the book on the shelf for other patrons. The edition requested for a second renewal had larger print, which was useful for the patron because large print helped him read. Still, the renewal limit was not waived. The patron was advised to sign out the edition with smaller print. It should come as no surprise that the patron left without his book.

In the example above, the borrowing policy was applied rigidly, without taking the entirety of the library's mission and values into consideration. Had the staff or manager considered the library's values and mission, they would have realised that, in this case, consistent application of the borrowing policy resulted in inequitable access to the resource for the patron with low literacy—directly contravening the library's stated respect for diversity (in this case educational diversity), literacy support, and universal access. In this situation, all levels of staff failed both the patron and the library because they did not critically engage the library's mission and values during the application of policy. Instead, they allowed an operational service policy to take precedence over the mission and values of the library. Unfortunately, the patron received a message loud and clear: do not bother borrowing books from this library unless you are a good reader.

The CDL needs to be mindful about when and how the word “policy” is used. To many community members, the word itself is a barrier. It calls to mind such phrases as, “Sorry, but that’s our policy” or even, “Thank you for your interesting suggestion, but it’s not our policy.” These kinds of statements are non-negotiable and are typically used to shut people down. Some community-led interactions do not lend themselves well to “policy,” because the existence of policies suggests preconceived limits and ideas as to the direction the community can take with the library. Sometimes the best policy may be no policy.

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community
Development
Librarian

Staff will often confuse the issues of *consistent* or similar policy application regardless of a patron’s circumstances, with the concept of *equity* of service provision. Waiving a fine for one patron but not another is perceived to be unfair. In this interpretation of a “fair” service paradigm, staff equate *same* with *equity*. However, this comparison is only appropriate when staff compare two patrons of equal socio-economic standing. But what is the same/equal about a working poor single mother raising two kids on a \$9 per hour salary and a professional mother from a family with an income of \$200,000 a year? One mother can get to the library anytime she wants with either of her two cars; the other can barely afford bus tickets so may not be able to get to the library in time. One mother has money to spare should she accrue a fine; the other mother would have to decide either to not return to the library or not feed her children. What is the same or equal about a political refugee who cannot speak English well and may not understand the western cultural values that inform public library service and those who have been raised in this country, know what rights residents should have, and how people expect them to behave? In such cases, *same* treatment means that those who are already advantaged stay advantaged and those who are not are further excluded. Is this really what public libraries want for their communities?

Rigid public service policy interpretation will always—almost without exception—disadvantage socially excluded community members because, as already discussed, policies are generally developed with a systemic bias toward people with economic, social, and personal means.

Instead, public library service policy application must always be made within the context of the library’s vision and values and not within the context of staff perspectives of what is “fair” or “right”. Whenever applying policy to a service situation, staff must always ask themselves if their application is a reflection of fundamental public library values such as access to information for all community members regardless of socio-economic circumstance, age, gender, literacy, and other social characteristics.

To support such a library values-based approach, service policy application must also always take into account the patron’s socio-economic circumstances. If it does not, the library will not be offering equitable library services simply because not everyone is economically or socially equal in the community or in the context of library policy.

Such policy application requires institutional flexibility and engaged staff. Public service staff cannot implement a flexible library values-based approach to policy interpretation without the support of their management and Board. Concurrently,

staff must understand that while it may be easier to treat everyone the same and just respond with, "Sorry, it's the policy", *same* only results in inequitable access to library services because not everyone is equal in our communities. Providing inequitable service to the community is not a core mission for any public library and nor should it be for any public library staff.

CONCLUSION

Policy is often viewed as a bureaucratic endeavour intended to provide strict guidance to staff. But it is really so much more. The process of service policy development allows the Board and staff the chance to create an institution that reflects their aspirations for the library and its community contributions. However, library service policies can only be inclusive of the whole community if we all commit to addressing the unintended yet inherent systemic biases that favour economically and socially advantaged community members. By doing so, our policy development process begins to reflect the whole community's experiences and, as a result, both our process and the policies themselves become systemically inclusive.

In the best of circumstances, properly and contextually developed policies are some of the library's most important internal documents, expressing the operational application of the library's vision and values for both staff and the public. When viewed within the context of fundamental library values, such as universal and equitable access, and combined with institutional values-based application, effective policy can transform a library into the vibrant, flexible, and inclusive social institution that it aspires to be.

I have heard some library professionals say that you should not do focus groups with non-library users. The reason they give is that non-library users will not have a context within which to answer the questions: they will be out of their element, they will be confused, and, if they give any answers, they will not be useful to the library. In my experience, this is not true. Non-library users have plenty to say about the library, whether it's asked of them in a focus group setting or in a one-to-one discussion. I've had many people tell me that they don't go to the library because x number of years ago they lost a book or got overdue fines. Since they can't pay, they have never gone back. I've had people say that they can't read very well and that they are too embarrassed to go to the library because of it. Now, are those things important for us to know? If that is what community residents are saying about their branch library, I think that this is crucial information. In terms of non-library users not having context, well, as library professionals, it is our job to give them context. We have to carefully formulate the questions that we ask of them, and we have to be prepared to listen to the answers.

– Patti-Lynne McLeod,
Community Development Librarian

aspire



Staff Development

The library system needs to create an environment that encourages staff to actively consult and collaborate with community members and that supports the risks and changes that result.

– Heather Davis,
Supervisor

The Community-Led Service Planning Model advocates for an important paradigm shift in library planning. In this model, librarians spend a significant amount of time learning from and working with the community. This model repositions library staff as learners and facilitators rather than experts.

Many of the skills and attitudes that dominate library service are transferable to community-led library work outside traditional library environments. Other skills, however, need to be added or enhanced in order to work effectively with and in our communities. Attitudes toward our communities may also need to be re-evaluated.

Some library staff feel uncomfortable working outside library walls and with socially excluded people. Additional training can bridge the gap between hesitation to work with the community and having the confidence to venture into the neighbourhood. Other staff members will be excited to work in non-traditional settings and are keen to develop and sharpen skills that improve their work.

The following discussion highlights important skills and perspectives that libraries can cultivate among staff and suggests ways to encourage library staff to acquire or enhance these skills.

FACILITATION

All Working Together Project librarians noted, in retrospect, that some type of facilitation training would have been helpful before beginning to work in the community. Facilitation skills are more than management or presentation skills: they focus on developing non-directive ways to draw people into discussions about themselves, their communities, and the needs of the community. Project librarians identified facilitation skills as valuable for disseminating information to staff and engaging new staff in community-based library work, as well as for working in the community.

At its core, community-led library work is about facilitating the community's role in the library—facilitating the expression of their needs for library services, facilitating their access to materials and services, and facilitating their leadership in service planning. For someone doing this work, it is important to be able to let go of one's identification as an expert and embrace the role of the facilitator.

– Randy Gatley,
Community Development Librarian

KNOWLEDGE OF ADULT EDUCATION

A number of Project librarians suggested that basic knowledge of adult education was helpful in planning responsive programming and training. It is important, for example, to understand the way adults learn—that adult learners always bring their experiences with them and are often afraid or ashamed of negative criticism. Staff who are not already familiar with adult learners should be encouraged to do some preparatory reading or speak with adult educators for information.

When librarians have an understanding of adult learning styles and challenges, they are better equipped to facilitate planning sessions for programs and services for adult community members. They are also better able to collaboratively design programs that will be successful for adult learners.

SENSITIVITY TO LITERACY

In diverse communities, literacy levels depend on many factors. It would be incorrect to assume that low literacy is a hallmark of social exclusion. Librarians working in the community need the ability and skills to assess literacy levels and the community's values and attitudes toward literacy on a case-by-case basis.

If low literacy is determined to be a factor in the community, then staff need to be aware of the challenges this presents. Literacy affects people's ability to engage with the library, the community, and society. Staff should have information and an understanding of:

- the difference between literacy, ESL (English as a second language), and ABE (Adult Basic Education);
- those cultural values that are important and associated with literacy; and
- the various forms and types of literacy.

Adults often visit the library to get information or attend a program about a new interest. It is socially acceptable to be a learner when you have a new interest in a complex topic. It is embarrassing to lack basic skills such as reading, filling out forms, or using a computer mouse. It is hard for adults to admit to such "weaknesses" in a public setting in which both staff and other users highly value education and competence.

– Darla Muzzerall,
Community Development Librarian

a new approach



CHANGE MANAGEMENT

For many library systems, community-led service planning will be an entirely new approach to working with the community. Across the four Project sites, librarians heard reactions to change ranging from “this is great”, to “we don’t need to pander to the poor”, to “the way we work is fine.” Often, there were comments such as “I already do this” even before there was a discussion about what doing community-led library work entails.

Many librarians plan services collaboratively with service providers in their community. Most, however, do not move past service providers and do not yet plan collaboratively with community members. Planning directly with community members is a significant change from how libraries traditionally engage the community. Collaboratively planning services with socially excluded community members is an even more significant change.

Staff will benefit from change management training as they shift the way libraries have usually offered services.

When implementing any type of major change, it is always useful to have internal advocates—staff who support the change and are sensitive to the challenges that other staff will experience as they adjust to the new paradigm.

Resistance is often the staff's first reaction to initial discussions about implementing community-led methods. Some staff assume that they are having yet another “new” project added to their already heavy workload. It is important for staff to realize that community-led activities will not be isolated as separate new and additional tasks and services. Rather, they are part of a shift in how we view and approach all of our existing services. It does not necessarily require “doing more things” but rather requires “doing things differently.”

– Stephanie Kripps,
Community Development Librarian

The Toronto Public Library developed a Working Together Project Steering Group of a few managers from across the system to discuss philosophy and progress. This was an effective way to spread the concepts to other parts of the system. The managers worked directly with staff in their own areas as well as promoted the Project's learnings at management and service committee meetings. Some staff have education and backgrounds outside the library system that help enrich the discussions with other staff. [This network of staff will be able to assist the system in further developing the skills and training needed for the work, as well as promoting the work with other staff in the branches].

– Heather Davis, Supervisor

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

A community-led approach to library services calls for staff to exercise a great deal of flexibility, perhaps much more than they have in the past. Staff will need to take risks making decisions when, previously, they might have been able to adhere to rigidly defined policy. Some staff fear that work will be more difficult without set rules, and they may fear making “mistakes.” Some staff members may never have been authorized to make decisions before and will need to be encouraged as they begin experimenting with a community-led approach to library work.

Staff need to know and feel that they are supported in making new types of decisions, particularly when such decisions are patron-centred and can sometimes appear to be ambiguous. This support should take the form of both policy and procedural change. It should include changes in how staff and supervisors are managed in the branch and at the public service desks.

KNOWING THE LIBRARY’S MISSION AND VALUES

It is important for staff to have a comprehensive understanding of their library’s mission, core values, policies, and services as these provide context for their work in the community as well as in the library. Additionally, understanding the library’s mission and values helps staff think critically about the library’s role in and responsibility to the community.

It is essential for staff to recognize the difference between the library’s institutional values and their personal values. Project librarians were most effective when they understood the values of their profession and their library, were able to put their own personal values aside, and listened to the community with the intent to understand the diverse values the community expressed. The role of library staff should be to build and facilitate a connection between community values and library values so that the library can better reflect and meet the needs of all community members.

In Vancouver, we are modifying our customer service training and difficult situations training so that all case studies and their discussions and responses during the training are considered within the context of the library’s core values and mission of inclusive library services and respect for diversity. We’re going to try to help staff understand that when we say we use our values to inform our work, we’re talking about the library’s values.

- Diana Guinn, Supervisor

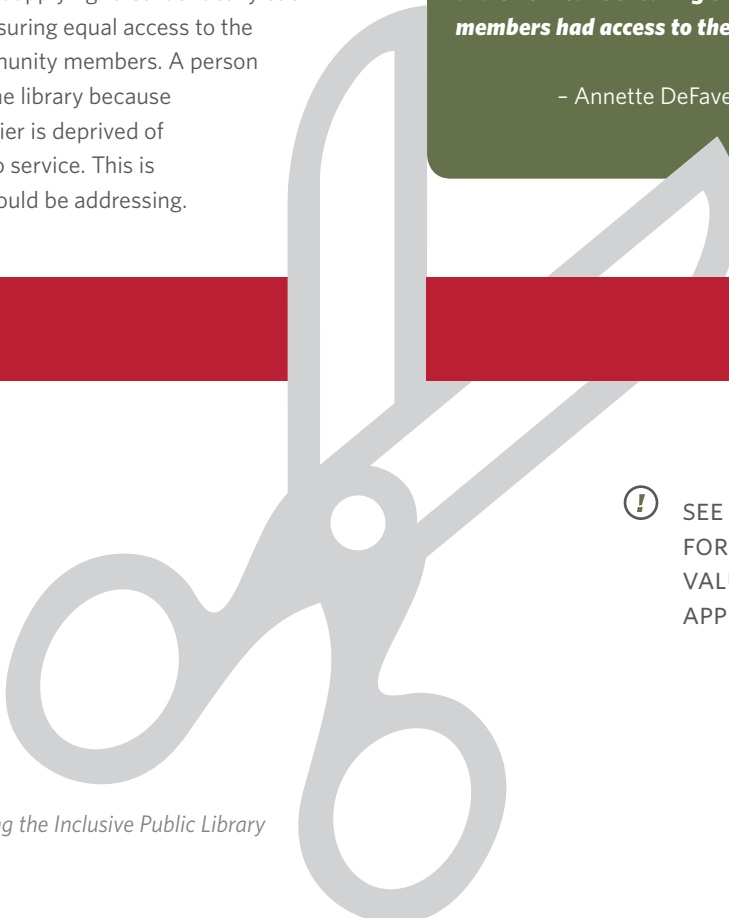


While many staff immediately see and understand the barriers that socially excluded people face, others do not, or do not believe the library needs to address them. Communicating the value of community-led library work to the fulfillment of the library's social responsibilities is critical. It is important to frame the discussion about social inclusion or exclusion within the context of the public library's mission and core values, making it clear that it is the values of the public library that drive services and policy decisions.

Library systems need to communicate the importance of equitable treatment, not equal treatment, in creating inclusion and developing "rules". It is easy to see how—while on the circulation desk for example—*equal* or *same* treatment is much easier to implement. Sometimes staff argue that forgiving fines for a selected group or individual is unequal or unfair treatment. It is important for staff to understand that equitable service is not about applying rules identically each time, but about ensuring equal access to the library for all community members. A person who can not use the library because of a monetary barrier is deprived of equitable access to service. This is the inequity we should be addressing.

I attended a staff meeting to discuss how fines were keeping some community members from using the library. One staff member said that the library should never waive fines because this was the only way the library could teach people to be responsible. The branch head explained that it was not the library's mandate to "teach responsibility to the community" and that the issue of fines was a more complicated one. When the discussion about understanding a person's economic situation and acknowledging a person's right and need to access library material failed to sway this staff member, the branch head explained that she respected the staff member's right to his opinion, but his job required him to interact with community members who could not pay their fines in a more compassionate and flexible way. The library needed to provide equitable service to all community members and this meant ensuring that all community members had access to the library's resources.

– Annette DeFaveri, National Coordinator



! SEE POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOR A DISCUSSION OF VALUES-BASED POLICY APPLICATION.

SOFT SKILLS

Project librarians identified a crucial set of soft skills that enhanced their ability to work with socially excluded communities. In some cases, these skills can be taught through training and, in others, they must be consciously and personally cultivated. Key elements to staff success in working with the community include: responsiveness, flexibility, adaptability, and self-confidence. Identifying and developing these skills with staff is vital to community-led library work. Necessary soft skills are listed below and are discussed in more detail in *Tool 8: Customer Service*.

- Critical Thinking
- Self Awareness
- Humility
- Active Listening
- Empathy
- Confidence
- Curiosity
- Open-minded attitude

SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

In Halifax, we decided to develop in-branch training, so all the branch staff would develop skills enabling them to work with and understand the community (i.e., low income, culturally diverse, under employed, geographically isolated). We aimed for developing staff that understood their users, of all backgrounds, and recognized the need to meet people where they were, whether that was in the branch or in the community.

The goals of the staff training sessions included:

- *Increasing staff's knowledge of the community served by the branch and the needs of the community;*
- *Identifying ways to improve customer service;*
- *Building the branch team;*
- *Providing staff with a forum to express their feelings about work, working conditions, community issues, and their needs as employees;*
- *Creating a staff that would understand what it meant to provide the public with a welcoming place to be; and*
- *Developing respect for the diversity of people who access library services.*

We were working towards having:

- *staff who would have new ways of interacting with their community;*
- *staff who would have developed the skills to help them identify community needs which, in turn, could result in new programming and services;*
- *a changed public perception of the branch, in particular by marginalized communities;*
- *staff who would no longer be strangers enforcing library rules and policies, but individuals who had the skills to recognize and work with those who have identified barriers to their ability to obtain library service; and*
- *staff who would have the knowledge of community and thus be able to be ambassadors for the library when they are out in the community. They would not be out in the community just to promote what we currently do, but have the skills to hear from community about their library needs and bring this back to the branch.*

It was also important that we acknowledged that there may be staff who will never be comfortable working with diverse communities. They may never develop a sensitivity to the needs of others and therefore were set in their ways. But we wanted to ensure that, in the future, we recruited staff who had the skills we were looking for or who were eager to learn the skills needed to work in diverse communities.

- Tracey Jones, Supervisor

RECRUITMENT

Having identified a core set of soft skills to facilitate collaborative and community-led work, the Project libraries began modifying job postings. It was essential to ask for proficiencies and comfort levels for staff members who would be working directly with community members. The job postings emphasized that new recruits should feel comfortable in community spaces and meeting new people outside traditional library settings. New staff members should be willing and excited to plan services in collaboration with diverse communities.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

In Halifax and Vancouver, the Working Together Project participated in writing job hiring descriptions for new branch librarians and for staff at various levels. Elements of community-led work were added to the job postings, including:

- *Recognizes the needs of users from a wide variety of cultural, economic, social and educational backgrounds;*
- *Develops and maintains branch collections, consulting with library committees and community members to identify needs; and*
- *Works with youth and supporting adults in the local community to identify needs, determine priorities and ensure that library services address the needs of young people and their families.*

In addition, these two libraries are looking at job postings at all levels to include the following competencies:

- *Ability to engage the community;*
- *Respect for diverse backgrounds, opinions and beliefs of library users and workers;*
- *Ability to consult with, respond to and reflect communities served by the branch;*
- *Ability to work in non-traditional environments; and*
- *Thrives on engaging a wide and diverse range of users in an interactive environment.*

– Tracey Jones and Diana Guinn, Supervisors



DIVERSITY HIRING

In order to remain relevant in our communities, libraries must start to hire public service staff that reflect the community. This means more than considering ethnicity or culture. It means considering socio-economic background as well. Libraries need to purposefully engage in recruitment, hiring, and training that includes and supports socially excluded community members.

Diversity hiring could involve partnerships with community agencies through which the library ensures that potential employees, who would not otherwise have access to mainstream hiring, training, and education, be supported in the process of becoming a library worker.

One of the reasons that the Albert Library is successful in connecting with the community is its practice of hiring Aboriginal staff from the community and celebrating First Nations traditions through the programs it features and the art it displays.

- Andre Gagnon, Supervisor



Importantly, the Working Together Project learned, from experience, that developing community-led library services requires the support of all levels of library management. Rarely does change happen quickly, but with ongoing support there is continued movement from traditional library services to community-led services. Working with staff to help them develop skills and to understand the importance of involving community members in the library is sometimes challenging, but certainly necessary, and always rewarding. The goal is to ensure that libraries become as relevant and welcoming for all community members as our mission statements envision them to be.



everything OK?



Service Evaluation

Not having spent a lot of time prior to joining the Working Together Project relying on quantitative methods, I found it quite natural to use a qualitative model. It made sense. You have no way of knowing what the effects of your work are unless you ask people, and let them respond in their own words.

– Randy Gatley,
Community
Development
Librarian,
Vancouver

BACKGROUND

As public institutions, libraries have a responsibility to ensure that the services they provide are meeting community needs effectively and efficiently. We do this by evaluating our services, seeking to understand if services are relevant, appropriate, and of sufficient quality to provide the best value for our community's investment.

Traditionally, public libraries have relied heavily on measuring outputs—or quantitative measurement of transactions—as our primary evaluative technique. In part, this is a very easy and fast way for us to measure, but we have also viewed it as objective and, therefore, more relevant.

We measure activities such as general circulation, specific collections use, gate counts, program attendance, open hours, dollars spent on collections, dollars spent per capita, website visits, and holds placed. From these numbers, we infer meaning. While there are always nuances to how we view statistics, in general, high use statistics are seen as an indicator of success.

There are significant weaknesses to this approach. Statistics can only tell us “how much” and cannot tell us “why”, “what”, “how”, or even “who” in enough detail to be useful. Statistics do not tell us how many people left the library with what they came for and if their needs and wants were met. Statistics can not record how many people leave the library pleased and how many leave feeling alienated. For this type of understanding, we need qualitative data.

That said, libraries do seek qualitative input. We commonly offer patrons the opportunity to contact us through comment cards, phone numbers, program evaluation forms, and email addresses. Our structured attempts, such as feedback forms, focus on existing users and are usually asking questions such as “what could we have done better.” Our unstructured techniques, such as providing contact information, are highly passive, relying on people to come find us. In all cases, these mechanisms are geared toward existing users with the self-confidence to engage the library.

ask them...

When we seek to reach non-users, we may hold a randomized community-wide telephone survey or mail-out a survey. In these cases, we are preferencing economically and socially advantaged, self-confident residents or users. Such methods are very unlikely to result in insightful responses from socially excluded community members about library services.

In short, the traditional methods of service evaluation have their uses, such as telling us how many items staff are handling or how many people have entered our spaces, but they have failed us in the area of assessing the inclusiveness, relevance, and outcomes of our services. Such methods cannot help us understand the real social impacts of our services or whether our attempts at offering inclusive services are working.

COMMUNITY-LED EVALUATION

The Working Together Project suggests a new way of evaluating services that will allow libraries to truly understand the effectiveness of our planning processes with, and services to, socially excluded communities. Community-led evaluation grows naturally from the same philosophy and practice that informs community-led service planning. This approach to evaluation relies on two principles: *community involvement* and *qualitative techniques*.

Community Involvement

Community involvement is essential as we seek to understand the inclusiveness and relevance of our services to socially excluded community members.

While the library will always have some questions it would like to ask, in community-led evaluation, the community should also define what measurements have value and how to interpret them. The latter point is an important departure for libraries—instead of making assumptions about what feedback means or what statistics represent, we ask the community to help us understand results. How would they interpret “low attendance” or “high attendance” for a program that had been collaboratively planned?

Involving community members in evaluating a planning process, service, or policy ensures that the community identifies what is relevant to them. It also offers library staff the opportunity to truly see the library and its processes and services through the eyes of the users. We learn what impact an interaction or service has had on an individual’s life.

let them respond



Qualitative Measurement

Qualitative evaluation can address some of the weaknesses in the quantitative approach.

Qualitative techniques rely heavily on narrative information. Where quantitative techniques answer “how much”, qualitative techniques can help us understand “why” and “how”. Qualitative evaluation helps us understand our community members’ motivations, frustrations, and successes and also the impacts or outcomes of our services.

Perhaps even more importantly is that qualitative methods allow us a more nuanced understanding of the reasons why many socially excluded people are not currently using the library. Likewise, such methods help us understand what it was about our collaborative planning processes that worked and what aspects did not work.

Qualitative information can be gathered through surveys and many libraries have included such open-ended questions in their surveys. The Project discourages the use of such surveys with socially excluded communities. Instead, we recommend conversations and informal focus groups as the primary ways to gather such information.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY-LED EVALUATION

If you have started community-led service planning by building relationships and collaboratively planning services, you are already almost there. The next steps are to simply ask people to describe the collaborative service planning process: ask them to speak about how they experienced the process and ask them directly what they thought of the service. Importantly, always probe for further information or if you believe you are receiving a stock response.

COMMUNITY-LED EVALUATION AND INCLUSIVE LIBRARIES

Community-led evaluation ensures that socially excluded community members express their priorities in their own voices instead of having to fit their responses into pre-determined categories that reflect the library’s values and priorities. Such a method allows us to understand what is important to the community about the services they use and how effectively the services addressed their needs.

Community-led evaluation marks a move away from our traditional reliance on statistics and outputs as measures of success. Such a method moves us toward texturing our reporting with outcomes, critical service and social analysis, and community voices. Most importantly, such a method sees libraries including the whole community in service evaluation.

*you've come
a long way.*



now what?



Looking Ahead

By Sandra Singh

National Director, Working Together Project

Canadian public libraries systems are facing increasingly complex environments of growing economic stratification, increasing language and cultural complexity, and diverging patron expectations of library services. Our existing users expect both the traditional print-based services and those involving advanced technology, and we aspire to offer services that enhance the Library's role as a public space and provide opportunity for community engagement.

The myriad pressures and changes facing Canadian municipalities promise exciting times for public libraries. There is opportunity to experiment with new types of technology-enabled delivery options and to anticipate new and evolving expectations posed by our evolving digital cultures.

But public libraries must be equally concerned about the impacts of economic stratification and rapid digitization on those without means or skills. For many Canadians—both rural and urban—the service impacts of pressing information issues such as “access or ownership” and “e-book or audiobook” take a necessary backseat as they struggle to find a place in their community, make ends meet, or simply survive. Their already marginal circumstances are exacerbated when the public institutions that socially and economically advantaged citizens view as supportive and inclusive actually further alienate as a result of unintentional yet inherent systemic biases—including public libraries, which are often described as intimidating, judgmental, and complicated.

Over the past four years, The Working Together Project has been engaging and working with socially excluded communities as partners and equals in an integrated ongoing way. We have worked to understand what systemic barriers can look like to socially excluded people and have learned how we can work respectfully and collaboratively with those who we—like our broader society—have largely left behind.

It is a different way of working: it is not what we were taught in library school and it is not how we were trained on the job. For most of us, Project members included, it is not how we have traditionally worked. But it is very possible. If we could do it in the Project, so can others. It simply takes a willingness to engage in critical self and institutional analysis and the courage and commitment to change.

If we all, as Canadian public library staff, can evolve our public libraries toward a community-led method of working, then what we will have created is something remarkable: a social institution that is so tightly integrated with the community that it can be immediately responsive and relevant to emerging community needs. We will have created public libraries whose operations truly embody both a sincere respect for diversity and our core professional commitment to providing universal access to information.

There is no doubt about it: public libraries are important to their communities. Community-Led Service Planning will make us better—more inclusive, more flexible, more dynamic, and more relevant to our rapidly changing and increasingly complex communities.

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there's more



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PARTNER LIBRARIES



For more information about the Working Together Project
or the *Community-Led Libraries Toolkit*, please contact
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www.librariesincommunities.ca.

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we worked together.



**Working
Together**