Solving Community Problems With Community Partners

Or, How to be a Lean Mean Community-Building Library Machine
Our Communities Have Many Facets
“It is unwise to think that you, your staff, and your board know all that there is to know about the community and the role the library can play in helping the community achieve its potential.”

-Community Needs Assessment: An Overview in Collection Development Training for Arizona Libraries
How do I know what *my* community’s problems are?
# Community Analysis

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<td>Population Trends</td>
<td>Industries</td>
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<td>Age Demographics</td>
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<td>Single Parent Households</td>
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<td>Ethnic Groups</td>
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<td>Employers</td>
<td>Service Groups or Organizations</td>
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**Footnotes:**

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats
• How is your community changing?
• What organizations/programs can you partner with that fit your library’s mission as well?
• What are your community’s expectations?
• How can you meet those expectations while remaining realistic about your responsibilities to the library?
Additional Community Information Sources

- Public records
- Library statistics
- Group/individual conversations
- Community forums
- Surveys
Analyzing Community Problems

Elements of this section were created by the Community Tool Box, a service of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, and is shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License
### Examples of Community Problems

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<td>Child abuse</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Teenage pregnancy</td>
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<td>Crime</td>
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<td>Racism</td>
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<td>Ethnic conflict</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Schools</td>
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Ask Yourself and Your Community Members

• When you think about the community, what keeps you up at night?
Criteria for defining a community problem:

- Frequency
- Duration
- Scope or range
- Severity
- Legality
- Perception
Why analyze a community problem?

• To identify the problem or issue
• To understand what’s at the heart of a problem
• To determine barriers and resources associated with addressing the problem
• To develop the best action steps for addressing the problem
• To determine potential community partners that can help, or may already be helping, address the problem
How much good can we actually do?

• Analyzing community problems can be hard work
• Real community problems can be complex and hard to solve
• When you look for reasons and underlying causes for significant problems, you’re likely to find more than one
• The problem may not only have more than one reason, it may have more than one solution, too
Creating a Path to Solve the Problem
Why should you try to solve community problems?
People’s support for libraries is related to the passion they perceive librarians feel for their library.
What organizations/programs can be partners with library in solving problems?
Potential Partners…

- Chamber of Commerce
- Social Service Groups
- Scouts/4-H/Youth organizations
- Community Coalitions
- Colleges
- Senior Housing Centers
- Schools
Partnerships Work!
How do we decide how to solve the problem?

- Cost
- Time
- People
- Obstacles
- Impact

- Side consequences, or spin-offs, or unanticipated effects
- Community preference
- The likelihood of success
What problems are you solving in your community?