



AWAKENING TO COMMUNITY POTENTIAL

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Rural communities are groups of residents with a tremendous diversity of experiences and talents. When we start to see our neighbors as resources, from those we call community leaders to those who too often get forgotten about, we awaken to new potential for building a stronger more resilient community. The library is one place, perhaps the only place, where the staff knows a large cross-section of people and what their backgrounds are. Librarians who get good at tapping into potential are able to accomplish an amazing array of things that you would never guess if you only looked at their budget. Those who gain a reputation for saying “yes” when people bring them new ideas create a positive feedback loop, with the library as a facilitator of community sharing.

What is in this tool?

This tool will help you think about how much your library currently serves as a facilitator of community potential and if you have any blindspots to the potential that lives in some groups of people in your town.

Further Resources:

Want to learn more about the value of seeking contribution from community members? See “Pathways to Belonging: Contribution”.

Want to learn more about creating programs that build connection? See “Creating Community Building Events” and “Pathways to Belonging: Delight”.

IN THEIR WORDS

“I think we are unique in that everybody pitches in... There's a lot of volunteer things that happen here. If something needs to be done, it's done in not too long a time.” (Heidi, interview # 1-1-02))



TELL A COMMUNITY MEMBER STORY

Acting with intention requires us to reflect on and assess our own thinking and actions.

First, take a minute to think about one specific community resident who you see regularly. Try not to think of a combination of library patrons. Focus all of your attention on just one person (library user or not).

Now, write down their story as you know it in the left column below. While you write, notice what specific skills, talents, knowledge, and experience this person likely holds. List those in the right column as you notice them.

Community Member Story (as you know it)	Skills, Talents, Knowledge



SELF-REFLECTION: Seeing Unique Community Member Knowledge

Consider your community resident, above.

In what way does the person you chose currently contribute their talents, skills, and knowledge to the community good?

What parts of their unique talents, skills, knowledge, and experience do you think could be useful for the community at large if it could be tapped?

Conversely, is there anything in their talents, skills, and knowledge that you think does not have value? If not, why not?

SELF-REFLECTION: Looking Inward

Consider how you see various community residents and how you value their ability to contribute.

Did you notice anything shifting in your own thinking when answering the questions above?

For you, was it a new way of thinking about community residents or do you commonly consider each individual's ability to contribute?



Did any personal biases reveal themselves?

What shifts in thinking and behavior could you do right now which would demonstrate you value each resident as they are, in their full unique complexity?

What are some specific actions you could take to facilitate community access to this person's talents, skills, and knowledge?

SELF-REFLECTION: Maximizing Community Potential

Consider the notion that everyone in your community has a set of potential contributions at least as robust as your example above.

Describe what barriers you have which make it difficult to see the value and potential contributions of each person in your community.

What actions can you imagine your library taking that would build connections between people with unique strengths and specific community wellbeing needs?
