



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

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WHY DO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When we say Community Engagement, we mean talking directly to local residents to learn more about their life, how they view their community, and how they describe a safe, happy, healthy life. This sort of information can be tremendously useful for libraries planning programs and services. Here, we are using it specifically in conjunction with the Pathways to Wellbeing Tools (www.rurallibraries.org), which were developed from nationwide research into the ways libraries make a positive impact on social wellbeing.

HOW DOES IT WORK

This is intended to be used in one-on-one discussions with community members. It can be used in group discussion, but group discussion should not be the only way you talk to people (because group dynamics pressure people to conform and make some voices louder than others). The worksheet will help guide your discussions. For many people it is much easier to approach a stranger if you have a clipboard and a script. The more you do it, the easier it will be. The worksheet can be printed for easy note taking. Where possible, do this exercise in teams of two, with one talker and one notetaker.

WHO SHOULD DO IT

While this exercise can be done by one or two people, it really helps to have a group all doing this at the same time. Library trustees, a volunteer group, or the library staff can pair up and go out in teams of two. It is always fun to meet up afterwards and share what you have heard!

WHERE SHOULD IT BE DONE

Anywhere people are! (As long as it's allowed and appropriate, don't do this during the church service). The farmers market, the park, the community bbq, the book sale, anywhere you have a library table set up with people walking by.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE WORK

- Respect people's time, but if they are having a good time spend as much time gaining a deeper understanding as you can with any given individual
- Don't ask questions about the library, this is about the community. (As soon as you ask a library question, all the answers are going to be about books.) If you must ask one, leave it as the very last question.
- You do not need to follow the suggested questions verbatim. If you change or add questions, try to keep them open ended and/or leading to follow up questions.
- There is not much value in talking only with people you already know. The more the people you talk to represent a broad and diverse sample of local residents, the more they are people you do not normally talk to, the better the information will be.
- For the same reasons, you probably do not want to do this in your library.
- Do not turn this into a survey! We know you want to, but surveys will not give you the kind of information and deep understanding that talking to people will.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHEET

In conjunction with the Pathways to Wellbeing Tools (www.rurallibraries.org), this worksheet is intended to be taken to a community gathering for one-on-one discussions. Use it to gain a better understanding of how local residents see their own town and areas in which you might make a real difference. Where possible, do this exercise in teams of two, with one talker and one notetaker. You do not need to ask questions verbatim, they are a guide, but remember you are trying to learn more about the community, not your library, so avoid library-specific questions. If time allows, ask the B questions or other follow-up questions to gain deeper understandings.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHEET

This worksheet is intended to be taken to a community gathering for one-on-one discussions, by itself or with other tools. Where possible, do this exercise in teams of two, with one talker and one notetaker.

Introduce Yourself (Don't worry, people like libraries and most love to talk about themselves!):

"Hi my name _____ and I'm doing a planning project for the _____ library. Do you have five minutes to answer a few questions?"

#1 A. Do you feel like the other people in this town know what your skills and talents are?

B. When you want to contribute to making the town better, are you able to?

#2 A. What percentage of people in this town would you say you know? 5%, 50%, 99%?

B. Do you like running into people you know in town, for instance at the post office?

#3 A. Do you feel like you have a say in how decisions that impact the whole community are made? B Are you a member of any community groups? If so, why? If not, why not?

#4 A. What do you find delightful or joyful about living here? B. Do you wish there was more to do? What ideas do you have?

#5 A. What about this community makes you feel safe and secure? What makes you feel not safe? B. Do you have adequate access to physical and mental health services? If not, how do you deal with it?

#6 A. How would you describe your ideal community? B. What would you change about this community to make it more like that?
