



CREATING COMMUNITY-BUILDING EVENTS

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I returned to work in my hometown library nearly three years ago. Exploring my hometown and learning about the rich culture of our area has given me a new appreciation for the beautiful community where I live.

People in rural communities often look to each other as a source of belonging. During interviews with the Rural Libraries Resource Team, residents of rural communities pointed to their libraries as places that help them feel connected to each other through entertainment, information, programming, and fun.

This community building, brings together community members and strengthens their bonds to each other improving the community wellbeing. Libraries can play a vital role in this endeavor, They can do it in fun, interesting, and informative ways.

What is in this tool?

- Reflective questions to help you plan a community-wide event that draws in individuals from various parts of your local community and makes new connections for them.
- Steps for planning, executing, and evaluating your own community-building events.

Further Resources:

Want more resources on using programming to strengthen the community? See “Pathways to Belonging: Delight”, and “Youth Empowerment”.

IN THEIR WORDS

“It’s just kind of nice to would be nice to I live in a smaller community where everybody kind of knows who they—who does this and why they live here. And you see people at these small town events like a spaghetti dinner, something like that. So it’s it’s nice to just meet other people who live around you.”

(Adam, interview #3-2-19)

CONSIDERATIONS

The first step in any sort of community and relationship building activity is an honest assessment of your community and its needs. If you have not yet, take the Pathways to Belonging assessment to learn some possible shortfalls and strengths of your own community in cultivating a sense of belonging. It can be found at <https://rurallibraries.org/pathways-to-belonging-to-be-seen-feel-known/>.

Hold your answers and these considerations in mind as you move through the rest of this tool.

Ask Yourself

What are the strengths in my community identity? What are the weaknesses?

Do the people in my community feel connected to the community? To the library? To each other? Are there groups who feel underrepresented?

In which ways can the community be strengthened through the library's presence?

What strengths and weaknesses as a director allow me to draw the community together?

EVENT EXAMPLE

Here in our village, I created a Photo Scavenger Hunt. The scavenger hunt spanned our entire community, and consisted of 28 photographs taken at local businesses, landmarks, and institutions. "Hunters" were challenged to go out and search for where these photographs were taken, noting the location and what exactly the objects were.

My hope for the hunt was to broaden residents' enjoyment of, participation in, and awareness of their local communities in three ways:

- Bringing people together in a team-building activity that will allow them to socialize and enjoy themselves in the area, hopefully bridging some of the existing divides in the community
- Promoting local businesses, including the library
- Providing exposure to a region's history and culture in a fun and interesting way.

YOUR TURN!

Ask Yourself

What community do you want to build? (Community of library users, bringing an underserved or underrepresented portion of the community into the mainstream, residents of a particular village, teenagers?)

Have you tried this type of activity before? What worked, what didn't work?

What are the interests of the community I serve?

How can I tie those interests into a fun event or program? Are there community partners I can engage to assist?

ROAD MAP

1. Starting point:

a. What is the purpose? What are you trying to accomplish?

b. What type of event might the library sponsor? For example, creating a community time capsule, scavenger hunt, day of volunteerism at local history sites, story walks, etc.

c. Who can help make this a reality? Will you do it yourself, or find a team of volunteers to help plan?

d. Which local businesses can I contact to partner or participate in the event? Think about businesses that might not ordinarily be asked, such as hardware stores, gas stations and convenience stores, local gift shops, etc.

2. **Plan the event:** What are the steps you need to take to make it a reality? What resources or expertise do you need to acquire before it can happen?

3. **Schedule the event.** When are people most active in your community and likely to participate? Do you have a special festival or event in your community that draws a large number of visitors who might participate? Do you have a seasonal population?

4. **Create the event materials** if needed.

- a. Does your event require special rules, clue sheets, etc?
- b. Do you need posters or signage?
- c. Think of small things like pens/pencils, tape, tools, etc.

5. **Advertise!** Do a marketing blitz! Hang posters. Put an ad in the local paper. Use your social media channels and website to promote your event. Generate buzz before the event even begins.

6. **Launch!** On launch day, gather a group of participants at the library. Ask the local media to get involved and come take pictures. Ask local civic groups to be sure their members come. Pass out materials and send people on their way.

7. **Wrap up:** Make a big deal out of the winners--this was hard work for them! Get photos, post the news on Facebook.

8. **Assess Outcomes:** A successful community-wide activity may lead to an increase in library patron registration and circulation, excitement over the re-discovery of community resources, strengthened partnerships with outside organizations, engagement with non-patrons, and strengthened bonds between residents. Will you do this again, or try something new? What would you do differently next time?
