Missouri Public Libraries Community Engagement Toolkit

This Toolkit contains the following sections:

Section I—Community engagement, what is it and why is it important?

Section II—Assessing community needs through data

Section III—The Partner Mapping Process—Steps in planning and implementing the engagement process

Section IV—Partner Mapping: Identifying, reaching, cultivating and sustaining partnerships

Section V— Partner Mapping: The library's role in meeting community needs

Attachment 1: Partner Mapping Overview

Attachment 2: Partner Mapping Toolkit Part 1

Attachment 3: Partner Mapping Toolkit Part 2

Attachment 4: Six Secrets of High Impact Presenting, which describes facilitation techniques used during trainings and meetings

Attachment 5: Collective Leadership Reading Activity

Attachment 6: Collective Leadership Assessment

Attachment 7: Seven Norms of Collaboration

Attachment 8: Facilitation Tips

Attachment 9: Additional Resources

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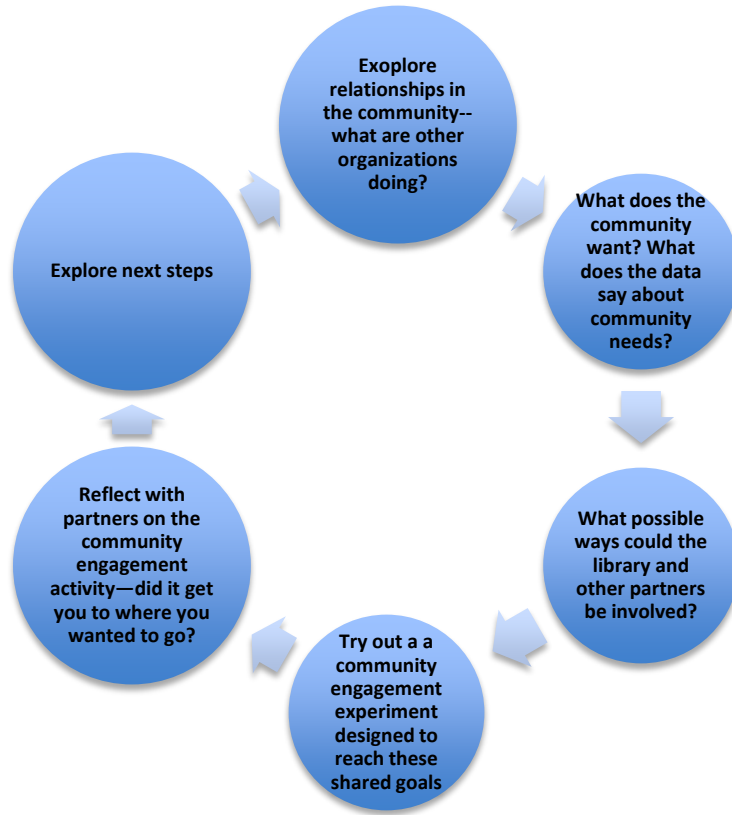**Section I—Community engagement, what is it and why is it important?**

Libraries have long been interested in community engagement. As their role in the community shifts, they have been exploring ways of using their resources and providing services beyond their traditional realms. In fact, a recent initiative of the American Library Association, "Libraries Transforming Communities," seeks to strengthen librarians' roles as core community leaders and change-agents. (http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities)

It appears that the dialogue around community engagement for libraries is here to stay, but what is community engagement exactly, and how do we build it? There is no simple or single answer to the question, "*what is community engagement?*"

Community engagement:
- Involves exploring different types of partnerships with community organizations and individuals.
- Means being open to community agendas and goals, instead of having a clear agenda or goal in mind and seeking support to get there. Instead of asking, what can you do to help me, it asks, what can we do together to support our community? At the heart of community engagement is relationship building.
- Has no single, well-defined outcome. Each initiative will have different results that will be dependent on the community, the types of partnerships that evolve and the community's aspirations and needs.
- Is BOTH a process AND an outcome. Engagement is an end result, as well as the work along the way.
- Community engagement does not stop. It does not begin and end with one community engagement outcome; it can instead become a way the library does business. We like to think of community engagement as a cycle. The diagram that follows illustrates the cyclical nature of community engagement.

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Exoplore relationships in the community-- what are other organizations doing?

What does the community want? What does the data say about community needs?

Explore next steps

What possible ways could the library and other partners be involved?

Reflect with partners on the community engagement activity—did it get you to where you wanted to go?

Try out a a community engagement experiment designed to reach these shared goals

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Section II—Assessing community needs through data

The goal of any community data analysis is to help guide decision making, so that library staff are making informed decisions and not decisions based on their own opinions or judgements. In this process, the first step is to figure out what data is already being collected and available to your library. Your library may be collecting data directly from library users or community members that can inform your decision-making processes.

What follows are some general principles for assessing community needs through data:
a. Be clear about the goal of your data exploration. How are you thinking that additional data will be useful to you?
b. Determine the types of data that you are interested in reviewing or collecting.
c. Reach out to community partners and ask them what data they are collecting and might be able to share.
d. Identify other existing data resources that can inform your efforts. Possible sources include:
    i. **The American Community Survey:** The ACS collects data on an ongoing basis, January through December, to provide communities with the information they need to make important decisions. Easy Stats gives you quick and easy access to selected statistics collected by the U.S. Census Bureau through the American Community Survey. With the American Community Survey, detailed demographic and economic statistics are available every year for the nation's communities and their people. This interactive tool provides the latest statistics about where you live. You can search different geographies including states, counties, incorporated places (towns/cities) and census designated places (CDP). With Easy Stats, you can view detailed racial, age and sex breakdowns and much more. https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/easy-stats/
    ii. **The Brookings Institution:** The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations that advance three broad goals:
        o Strengthen American democracy;
        o Foster the economic and social welfare, security and opportunity of all Americans; and
        o Secure a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international system.
        Research by topic area can be found at: http://www.brookings.edu/research#trade/topics/

Once you have some data, it is important to view it with an open mind. It can be helpful to do this with a group of people in order to assess how it informs your thinking regarding your community exploration. The following data reflection tool provides prompt questions to guide you through a data reflection process.

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The data reflection process

Important to remember:
- Describe only what you see—the data in front of you
- Resist the urge to immediately work on solutions
- Seek to understand differences
- Ask questions when you don't understand
- Surface the lenses and experiences you bring to the data
- Surface assumptions and use data to challenge and support them

Questions for looking at data:

Step 1: Clarifying focus

What are we attempting to monitor/explore/learn?

Step 2: Making predictions

What are your predictions for what the data will show?

Step 3: Exploring the data

What are you noticing in the data?
What surprises you?
What are the strengths that stand out?
What themes are you noticing?
What connections are you making?

Step 4: Analyzing causal factors

How is the data different from what you expected? How is it the same?
What might be causing this data to emerge?

Step 5: Construct new learning

What are we learning about our community?
What might we want to pay attention to in the future?

Step 6: Learning about collecting data and the tools we use:

What are we learning about the data collection process?
What might we want to pay attention to in the future?

Step 7: Commit to application

How might we apply what we have learned?
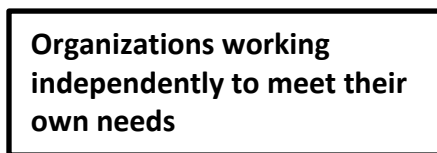Who will do what by when?

Area 7—Reflection

How has this data review process been useful?

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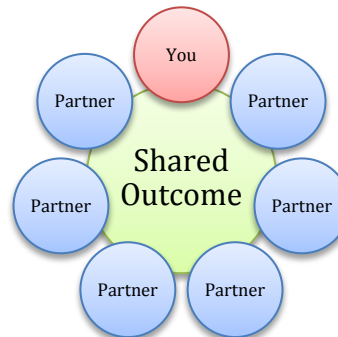**Section III—The Partner Mapping Process—Steps in planning and implementing the engagement process**
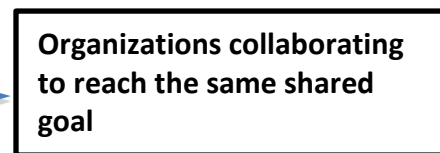
The Partner Mapping Toolkit included in the Appendices provides detailed guidance on the 8 steps in the Partner Mapping process. This process has been designed to support libraries and other organizations in developing community partnerships to reach shared goals.

Part 1 of the Toolkit is a narrative description of the process. Part 2 provides templates to support you. Use the Toolkit in a way that works for you. Some people follow the process from beginning to end; others pick and choose and use it *a la carte.*

From: **To:**

| Organizations working independently to meet their own needs | Organizations collaborating to reach the same shared goal |

In developing this community engagement tool, we have taken a step-by-step approach, dividing the work into eight stages. The full document provides instructions for each step, plus helpful templates for organizing your work.

8 Stages of Partner Mapping

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6	Stage 7	Stage 8
team	shared goal	area	partners	people	interviews	next steps	conversations

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Section IV—Partner Mapping: Identifying, reaching, cultivating and sustaining partnerships

The first 6 states of the Partner Mapping Process are focused on identifying, reaching out to others, and cultivating partnerships. The work of cultivating partnerships is the work of keeping in touch, and nurturing those relationships in a way similar to how we naturally nurture friendships. Some people do this easily. Others need to track how they keep in touch and plan to re-connect with people. The first 6 stages of the Partner Mapping process (described fully in the Toolkit) are as follows:

Stage 1: Form a team to help with the partner mapping process. This team will assist in brainstorming potential partners, eventually reaching out to, and meeting them. The team can be comprised of board members and/or staff.

Stage 2: Articulate a wide goal. This makes the goal more likely to be shared by others. For example: creating a healthier community, or increasing youth resilience are wide goals. Narrower goals that could limit potential partners include: creating a Friends Group or getting more school-aged children in to the library. At this early stage of exploration, forming a wide goal is the most useful for identifying potential partners.

Stage 3: Define the geographical area for your exploration. This could be a neighborhood, community, city or state.

Stage 4: Brainstorm potential partner organizations, like businesses, government agencies, other nonprofits, funders, churches, neighborhood associations, etc.

Stage 5: Contact people in the organizations identified in *Stage 4*, and ask to meet or talk on the phone.

Stage 6: Hold interviews with change makers from the organizations contacted in *Stage 5*. Your goal is to ascertain which of those organizations actually would prove a good fit, which share a common goal, which share values, and which are interested in exploring partnering. Partnership building is having a different conversation. This means that you must ask different types of questions and provide opportunities for people to engage.
- The **identification of information** about existing resources, strengths, and assets of individuals and organizations in the community, and discovery of what is working that could be built upon,
- The **development of relationships** with individuals and organizations who share a common goal of community health and are interested in working with others to explore how to leverage existing resources, and
- Some **initial ideas** of how partnerships could be formed or expanded to maximize existing resources.

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Things to keep in mind when thinking about this phase

The goals of the conversations are to:

- Start building relationships or renew existing relationships,
- Learn about potential new partners and learn more about existing/past partners,
- See if and how others want to be involved in the future, and
- Begin to make connections and identify potential opportunities for collaboration.

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Stages 7 and 8 of the Partner Mapping Toolkit look at possible ways that community engagement efforts might unfold. Because the work is varied, there is no single role that a library may adopt as the result of a community engagement process.

Stages 7 and 8 are as follows:

Stage 7: Assess what you have learned. Groups that have done this have found immediate ways to collaborate with new partners toward shared goals. What could you begin doing right now? Did you find out about existing groups you could see joining? Did the people you interviewed want to meet with others?

Stage 8: If there is interest in forming a new multi-organizational collaboration, then it may be time to convene a community conversation.

There are three possible structures for the partnerships that may emerge:

- **Possibility 1: Partnerships form—**Partnerships are formed with individual partners/organizations to leverage impact and further shared goals.
- **Possibility 2: Entering an existing collaboration or coalition—**You enter into an existing coalition/collaboration in order to leverage impact and further shared goals.
- **Possibility 3: Formation of a new collaboration or coalition—**With key partners identified in this process, you form a new collaboration/coalition to leverage impact and work toward shared goals.

The relationships and shared work developed in each of these scenarios are equally valuable. There is no single desired outcome of the partner mapping process. As long as you are building connections that have their foundation in shared goals and work to increase impact, this is success.

**The following graphics illustrate the three possible outcomes:**

Possibility 1: Partnerships form
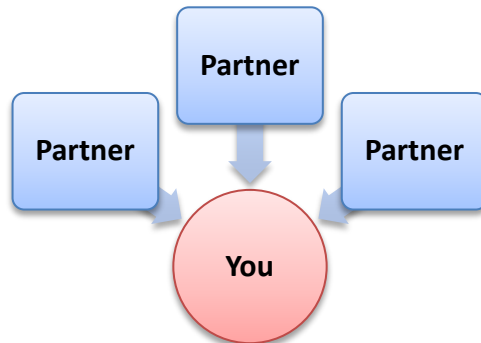
If your conversations result in the formation of partnerships with multiple individual organizations, the following considerations could help guide your work:

- As you become comfortable with the first wave of partnership building, think about reaching out to other potential partners by revisiting the categories of organizations in Stages 3-6 and identifying new categories to focus on.
- Think about expanding your work by broadening your geographic area.

Possibility 2: Enter an existing coalition
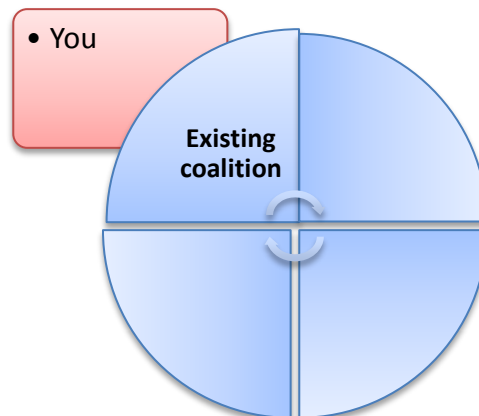
If in the course of your conversations you discover that there is already a coalition that shares your vision for the community, and you decide to join, the following considerations could help guide your work:

- How are you able to leverage your assets and resources to increase community impact?

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- How can you utilize the work done in stages 1-7 to support the work of this collaboration? Are their new partners you have identified who could be at the table?

Possibility 3: Forming a new collaboration or coalition to leverage impact and further shared goals

If your conversations lead to an interest in forming a new collaboration or coalition, then you may need to host a community conversation. The following considerations could help guide your work:

- Who on your team will support you in planning for the community conversation?
- What are the goals of your community conversation?
- Who has the facilitation skills necessary to help plan and orchestrate the conversation?

Resources and attachments:

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