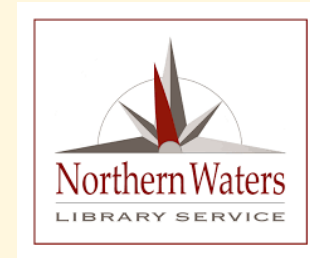# Library Engagement: What Your Community Needs and How to Respond
Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Building and Maintaining Customer Relations #2

Presented by the Wisconsin Valley Library Service,
with support from the Northern Waters Library Service
and the Southwest Wisconsin Library System.

with Pat Wagner–patternresearch.com
Pattern Research, Inc., Denver, Colorado

Key Idea: #1

Libraries help individuals, institutions, and communities achieve their better futures.

Key Idea: #2

Library engagement begins with everyone who works for and/or represents your library treats everyone with courtesy and respect.

All the time. No exceptions.

Earn your community's trust every day.

Caveat

If you collect data, how will you guarantee that the data is kept private and secure?

If you are mining data from existing sources, how do you know it was done ethically and with permission of the people?

Do people interviewing your stakeholders know to respect confidentiality?

Outcomes

- **Partner with your library stakeholders so you can see, hear, and understand the world from their points of view.**
- *Find more ways to interact with your community and institutions outside the library's walls.*
- **Evaluate current programs, services, collections, and staffing for their relevance to your customers' changing needs.**
- *Make more room for change by making hard decisions about existing priorities and the allocation of time, attention, staff, and assets (meaning money, meeting rooms, space in the calendar.)*

Agenda

- **Introduction to Library Engagement**
- **What Community Organizers Know**
- **Preparation for Market Research: 24/7/365**
- **Questions to Ask**
- **Identifying Cohorts and Target Audiences**
- **What Can Your Library Do?**

Agenda

Introduction to Library Engagement

The Principles: #1

Library engagement starts
with market research and dialog:
Awareness, change, and response.
Rinse and repeat.
It's an ongoing conversation: 24/7/365.
Not just a survey once each year.

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The Principles: #2

Personally, and on behalf of the library, you're building relationships with stakeholders.

It's not just about gathering statistics and checking off boxes on a to-do list.

The Principles: #3

There is not one best way
to collect information
to better serve your community, institutions, and individuals.

The Principles: #4

It's too easy to walk into a meeting or event and talk only with people you already know.

Pretend you are a host whose job is to make strangers and newcomers feel welcome.

This is how you decide who you contact first during your library engagement initiatives.

Agenda

What Community Organizers Know

Mistakes We Make

- **Taking action without researching first**
  - Making assumptions: Complacency
  - Not recruiting mentors and advisor from different groups you want to connect with
- **Relying solely on surveys and statistics**
  - The map is not the territory.
  - Not listening to stories firsthand
  - Not participating in their events

Mistakes We Make

- **Ignoring their needs on their terms**
  - Starting with your own agenda first
  - Dismissing small opportunities
    to be of service
- **Ignoring political landmines**
  - Competing with or undermining
    existing projects and initiatives
- **Ignoring existing concerns**

Mistakes We Make

- **Disrespecting the existing leadership**
- **Discounting their strengths**
- **Ignoring or demeaning their successes**
- **Cutting them out of decision-making**
- **Burying them with money and status**
- **Not allowing time to think and speak**

Mistakes We Make

- **Not making communication a priority**
- **Not taking criticisms seriously**
- **Not giving credit and sharing success**
- **Not sharing resources**
- **Not apologizing quickly for mistakes and misunderstandings**

Agenda

Preparation for Market Research: 24/7/365

The Principles: #5

Ensure everyone is on board.

Engaging with your community is in every job description and not limited to the *"COMMITTEE".*

Three components

- *What everyone does every day:*

  Interested in the people they serve

- *What is added to existing interactions:*

  Programming, services, customer service

  Quick surveys, open-ended questions, polls

- *Standalone marketing initiatives:*

  Presentations at public meetings, Q and A

  Committee membership and participation

It's a project

- *Someone* responsible for library engagement
- Written *goals,* meaning what do you want to accomplish after you apply what you learn
- A *timeline* with checkpoints and deadlines
- Allotted *staff time* and what will have to wait/be cancelled to *reserve time and money*
- *Budget? Resources?*
- **Follow-through? Evaluations? Tweaks?**

Caveat

Most of your time, money, personnel, and attention will be spent AFTER you collect your information.

Most library engagement projects fail because they run of resources and people run out of energy and interest.

Hurts a library's credibility, by the way.

Fresh Ears and Eyes

"We never knew!"

"We assumed!"

"You never asked!"

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Agenda

Questions to Ask

Why Research Methods Fail

- **Limited to questions you ask, and:**

- **By expectations.**

- **By time and money.**

- **By recipients' contact preferences.**

- **By differences re what people say/do.**

- **By being only a sample.**

Balancing Methods

- **Formal vs informal and casual data collection**

- *Qualitative/descriptive vs (numbers) quantitative*

- **Structured vs open-ended interviews**

- *Importance of people vs statistics*

How to Ask

- *Surveys, polls, and votes:* **Written, phone, response cards, computer, ballot boxes**
- *Interviews:* **In person, telephone, online**
- *Focus groups:* **Open vs specific questions**
- *Informal chats* **inside and outside library**
- *Maps and databases:* **census.gov**
- *Other people's data and interviews*

Questions

- **What Do You Know About Your Library's Customers?**
  Some examples of questions you should be able to answer.

- **Where do your library's customers live in your community?**

- **What are their neighborhoods and zip codes?**

- **Are they working, running a household, raising children, retired, going to school, or something in-between?**

- **What other generations are they responsible for: grandchildren, blended families, returning adult children, elderly, frail or ill, nonworking adults?**

Questions

- **Are they in school? Are they retooling their jobs or career paths to stay employed? Do they need computer classes or help with technical classes or distance learning?**

- **Do they rely on government or charitable support? Food stamps, pantries, clothing donation, help with heating bills, daycare, mortgage payments?**

- **What do they like to do for fun? Activities, events? Formal or informal? Travel? Scheduled or drop-in?**

- **How and where do they eat? Which restaurants, food stores?**

- **Where/how do they shop for clothing and household goods?**

Questions

- **How do they get around? Car, friend, rental, shared, public transportation, bicycle, walking?**
- **Are they English-speaking at home? What languages?**
- **How much disposable income do they have? What is their socioeconomic status? Are they slipping into poverty?**
- **How nostalgic are they? Do they live for the past, are they focused on current issues, or thinking about the future?**
- **How are their lives changing?**

Caveat

Beware *"aggregated"* data. **Clumping complex statistics into *one fat number* can hide important details and skew info.**

Agenda

Identifying Cohorts and Target Audiences

Cohorts:

- **Frail elderly, male or female, chronic disease, homebound, caretaker family, perhaps living with older family members, perhaps also a caretaker for others**
- **Single mother (divorced, widowed, never married) with teenage children and perhaps also taking care of the grandchildren as well**
- **High school student, dealing with inadequate school library and trying to take advance placement classes online**
- **Hard to find healthy food on a limited budget**

Cohorts:

- **Middle-class family with children, facing the loss of their business and home due to the pandemic**
- **Retired couple looking to start a new business or supplement their income. Interested in finance and investments as well**
- **Single or couple, interested in cultural activities, lifelong education: art, dance, music, opera, theater, film, literature**
- **Single or couple, active in community affairs and local political issues. Wants place to meet and rabble-rouse, despite and because of the pandemic**

Cohorts:

- **Tourists researching genealogy, looking for archives, family records, local papers, and local history and genealogy books**
- **The lonely: shrunken social networks, retired away from home, came to your town to care for elderly parents, parttime job, no connections to the community outside of the family**
- Housebound new immigrants: Usually wife or other older female relatives. Came with family but is not working and is not in school. No way to socialize outside small group from same country. Not computer literate. Poor English skills

Cohorts:

- **Grandchildren uber alles - Want to be with the little ones who live out of state - Devastated by the pandemic separation**
- **Divorced, usually father, looking for activities for weekends that aren't about drinking and can connect with the kids**
- **College graduate student taking their degree online from a distant university. Needs a coach to figure out the LMS**
- **Small businessowner concerned about lack of workplace skills, including basic math, in potential young hires**
- **The household has WiFi, but doesn't know how to keep their finances safe or work with government websites.**

Cohorts:

- **Family with special needs child has lost much of its support network because of the pandemic**
- **White-collar worker in early thirties desperately job-hunting**
- **Can't reach government services that are closed after 4 pm**
- **Daycare provider wanting to provide their eight charges with *"reading readiness"* experiences at least twice a week, but no car and dicey WiFi**
- **Husband retired, wife still working, because easier for her to find a job. Not enough money for both to retire**

Agenda

What Can Your Library Do?

Short Form

What are *four* typical problems they're trying to solve in their personal and professional lives?

Long Form

- **What's the better future that your library users want?**
- **What are their new expectations of success?**
- **What are their biggest concerns?**
- **What do they spend most of their time doing?**
- **What do they want to spend more time doing?**
- **What technological and cultural surprises await them?**

Library Engagement

- **Libraries without walls**
- **Information is more than books and media.**
  Hands-on learning of all kinds
  Programs of all kinds
- **A hub for creation of all kinds**
- **A hub for services of all kinds**
- **Partner w/ other agencies inhouse**
- **Partner w/ other agencies outside the walls**

Next Step?