Practical Community Development Projects for Small Public Libraries

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Definition of Community development

I feel very excited by what is happening in public libraries today. Now as never before we are embracing our role as agents of social change, creating collaborations and taking on the task of developing capacity in our communities. Libraries are less passive purveyors of service and more and more players in a community's wellbeing – high profile, valuable, integrated.

I have really come to love my own role in community development, that begins with developing relationships.

Building a cultural community

Trail and I go back to 1999 when I moved there to take on the job as Library Director. In about 2001 the Lonely Planet called Trail BC's most toxic city, which stems from its lead/zinc smelter in the downtown core, and its long past history of environmental problems. Trail took this challenge to heart and developed a Communities in Bloom program, and its reputation as BC's number 1 sports town. For myself, I saw untapped opportunities to develop cultural services. Not everyone is a hockey player or a sports lover. The City is full of writers, artists, musicians and historians. For a small rural community, culture can be an economic engine, as in cultural tourism, or a draw for people to move to a community or even just a richer way to be in a community. Even though we are a

proud sports town, there are residents who are engaged in the arts more than in sports, and these people's needs can also be met. Cultural amenities and achievements can be another source of pride, like sports achievements, creating diversity in the community.

As a member of writing collective called the Columbia River Writers in my personal life, I have had the opportunity to merge our activities as writers, library programming and community development. The CRW was formed in April 2000 after a first-ever writing workshop attracted 75 participants from all around the Columbia basin. The group went on to offer three more workshops and conferences, published a couple of books, and did some readings. The project I want to talk about is a writing contest called United by the River. For this project, the Library offered official sponsorship, which meant my time, could be spent working on the project during work time.

What were the benefits?

1. Widespread PR – this project went to the East and West Kootenay, and into the entire Boundary, an area from Revelstoke, to Trail, from Cranbrook, to Grand Forks. Any information that went out from the contest would include the Trail Library logo, and would, I felt, bring positive notice to the City of Trail as a cultural contributor.

2. Over 100 authors contributed to this contest, and many of them telephoned me or wrote to me for contest details. The PR was extensive and included newspaper coverage all through the boundary. We also included the 18 libraries in our PR network, and I believe that many of the libraries were noticed in the project.

3. Finally, the network of writers was strengthened. We had a lovely reception in Rossland at the end of the contest, and many people came there to meet each other and talk. It was always one of the goals of the CRW to develop culture through strengthening networks, and by creating alliances with likeminded organizations. We attracted the support of other organizations such as of the Skills Centre in Trail, the Credit Unions, Teckcominco and the Columbia Basin Trust.

So beyond being the Number 1 sports town, which of course, is a good thing, we are becoming a literature town, a writing town, and a cultural place.

Our goals today:
- We are going to learn some of the theory behind community development, its challenges and benefits.
- I am going to present ideas around constructing partnerships: finding areas of agreement, anticipating potential problems, how they work well.
- I am going to share with you some practical projects I have done in Trail.

I am hoping that you can ask questions and contribute your own ideas as we go. The whole topic of community development is so fascinating and can be approached in so many ways that it would be useful for us to put our ideas together. Just so you know, though, I have about an hour of content and it's on a handout as well as printed out as a talk for those who are interested.

What is community development?

First we have to answer the question, "What is Community development." I had the opportunity to engage with a number of librarians at the literacy forum on Dec. 5 and everyone came to the same first answer: community development meets the unique needs of the community. We ask "What does our community need and how can the Library help?"   A very wonderful definition of community development was articulated in Brian Campbell's document on the Libraries in Marginal Communities Demonstration Project, when he described the differences between community outreach and community development. Outreach means that we take a library program out to the community, like offering Ready to Read for a parenting group, or a Web Aware presentation for a PAC. Community Development means that you build relationships in the community that articulate needs and develop solutions. I will talk later about what some of those needs might be and how to engage with the community.

I would like to clarify that public Libraries, by their services and existence, are organizations of community development. A library and its staff have resources and skills that can be used by community groups and individuals for self education, to find jobs, to become literate, to make social connections and so on. We do this through the immense variety and excellence of our resources, and by building relationships and by taking the initiative to develop partnerships.

The community development librarians also talk about the barriers presented by public libraries to people who are outside the traditional middle-class clientele. Their project seeks to involve socially excluded members of the community by developing relationships with them, trust and over time, paths to offer them services.

I think that libraries can contribute to the well-being of the community, building its capacity to offer jobs and homes, to be prosperous, to be a good place for many unique people to live, to attract growth and new residents, to have a better image (Trail). These are the general needs of most communities, and each community will also have specific needs that must be addressed: in Trail, homelessness, issues around mental health, poverty, and the whole problem of the image of the city, with a lead/zinc smelter in its downtown core. Some issues we do not have: at this time we do not have an immigrant community as in the lower mainland where libraries have worked hard to develop services with that group. With regard to children, we have the lowest indicator in the

Province for risk factors for children going into school. So we have less need in some areas and more in others. For example, A local businessman, a manager at the power company FortisBc, and one of our partners, said that he sold support for our request for funding the Let's Read festival project on the basis of his organization's need for literate employees. So we are developing the capacity of employers to hire competent workers, and by supporting literacy, we are helping individuals achieve employment.

Other library missions include the ability to support self-education, to be a good place for children and families, and to be inclusive and democratic in the provision of information.

Strangely, an appreciation of these benefits is often not effectively conveyed to our communities and must be continually articulated to stakeholders, especially to municipal councils, but also to influential organizations such as the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce, other service clubs, schools and so on.

Just to clarify, this is not a workshop about advocacy, but about specific projects that I have undertaken in Trail, with the objective of strengthening our community, that were over and above the normal library services of providing books, information, programs, hours of opening and so on.

My goals were to develop our organization's services and capabilities, to do this with other community stakeholders in order to

create a presence for the Trail Library, and to unlock the huge and exciting potentials of collaboration on behalf of the whole community.

Mindsets of collaboration: In the beginning

Let's look at some facts of community life. First of all, cities compete. In our area, there is competition among the municipalities for hospitals, for schools, for businesses, for new residents – the arena is competitive and the resources are limited.   At stake is the fundamental issue of jobs, of livelihood, the basis for viable rural communities.   The rural communities are struggling with various forces that include globalization and a drop in support from Provincial dollars, making it necessary to focus on own-source revenues.

The Library's assets form a part of the community's assets and can be mobilized to contribute to the struggle to thrive.   Do not be afraid to enter this competitive fray and work on behalf of your community, not against others, but toward the best that you can be. I believe in Trail and the Trail area and I am their advocate.

After Trail's problem in Lonely Planet as the "most toxic city in BC" recently Trail was honoured as BC's number 1 sports town.   Of course, with the Kootenay Library Federation and the initiatives of the PLSB to create greater unity with the one card initiative and so on, the boundaries of our communities are expanding, and this is good, but as the Trail Area Library, I support Trail and its area communities with no harm meant to

other communities, but with vigour and enthusiasm for our local service, overcoming weaknesses, building on strengths.

In terms of community development, you have to want to do it. I was reading recently about Steve Jobs, founder and owner of Apple, who believes in cross-pollination of ideas as a way to go warp-speed toward progress. This means that his employees sit and talk - a lot. They hash things out and contribute and they change the face of technology.

You must step out from behind your safe walls and play with others. But beyond just talking: Actually do something that will bring credit to the community. Do some high-profile community work to show that you are an asset and a resource.

Identifying areas of common interest

By working together, we are empowering each organization to do their mandate better than by working alone.   Don't do it otherwise. If you don't see benefits for yourself and the other, just don't bother. The opportunities are endless, and you need to prioritize.   These priorities can come from your strategic plan. Our priorities as articulated in the Trail Library Strategic plan are to : increase use, increase awareness, increase support.

In order to identify common interests, it helps to look at what motivates business, non-profit and government sectors. Business wants to increase profit, increase markets, increase positive image in the

community. Non-profits want to supplement revenues, expand access to the community, and maintain a positive image. Government wants to use public dollars effectively, offer services, and maintain a positive image.

You can see a good starting place here for identifying common interests: things they all have in common are a concern for image, service and a desire to prosper financially.

So community development is about relationships – interpersonal, organizational, and we have goals in common and we have to work together.   One good way to work together positively is to form partnerships and construct agreements.

Partnering with Purpose , a book I highly recommend, talks about four levels of partnerships: The glance, the date, the engagement and the marriage. This intriguing metaphor describes four levels of commitment to working together: a brief encounter such as giving a speech at the Rotary Club, a short-term project such as helping with a community event, a formal agreement to work together toward a marriage, such as the decision to participate in Success by 6, or a long term relationship such as the Trail Library has with the Literacy Associations in Trail – we have combined our efforts for a long time to share the work, the risk and the results.

What can we accomplish in our community development partnerships?

For the Library:

We can reach new users

Gain support for the library

Create new resources

Fulfill our mission

We can develop the community.

For the community:

Create development

Help the community become a better place.

Solve problems.   Eg. Trail's image.

Constructing agreements

Some questions in constructing agreements:

Level 1: philosophical

- Do you share common values?

- Are your aims congruent?

- What are the benefits to each partner?

Level 2: practical

- Who will do the work?

- Who is in charge?

- How will decisions be made?

- How will the expenses be shared?

- What is the timeline?

- What will happen upon completion?

- How will conflicts be dealt with?

- Who in the organization will be working together?

Unless it is all very clear and spelled out, there are opportunities for confusion and conflict.

I put agreements in writing, and specify the details very clearly. Still, things can be missed. It is also good to be flexible and make changes when necessary.

Problems, conflicts and pitfalls

- Relationship or staff changes: if the CEO leaves, for example, the desire for a partnership might change.

- Control issues: Decisions made without consultation, or fights over who is in charge of projects. For example, our partnership involves the Literacy Association and Success by 6. Our project includes a piece that is proposed by Success by 6, but one of the Literacy team members is not in favour of the project. What happens then?

- Differences in corporate culture: Like the difference between the Selkirk College and the Trail Library – the College exists in a

hierarchy and bureaucratic structure that must be understood in order to us to work together.

- Lack of clarity about the project - No matter how carefully the details are worked out, there is always the unexpected piece that comes up to confound us. A person says something that is misunderstood or understands something different from what was intended.

- Library staff not in favour of the partnerships: it does involve opening the organization up to new influences and different ways of working, and this has to be communicated to staff in a positive way. Keep in mind that staff on the front lines often have a very practical and astute way of assessing these relationships and it would be useful to take their point of view into account, especially if you are increasing their workloads with no intention of increasing their staff time.

Multitudes of details, but I encourage you to read <u>Partnering with Purpose</u> to learn more about working together.

<u>Project 1 Microfilm project with Selkirk College, the Historical Society, and the Trail Daily Times</u>

This project brings together stakeholders with one common interest: accessing historical information through making Trail Daily Times

available on microfilm. I had obtained grants to purchase the newspapers from 1895 to 1997. The challenge for us is that in 1997, the Legislative Library no longer felt it was a mandate to film community newspapers and so the cost went from around $35 a reel to around $200 a reel. However, it appears that the second reel can be purchased for $35, making the whole cost about $120 per partner, if there are two partners. And of course, Selkirk College in Castlegar also offers the newspaper on microfilm.

I contacted the College to see whether they were interested, and I also called the Trail Daily Times to get their support, and the Trail Historical Society. They are all affected by history and the newspaper and can make contributions that include:

- Money for the project
- Time to spend on it
- Public Relations to promote the initiative.

By bringing together these diverse organizations, we can accomplish three goals:

1. Get the microfilm for cheaper than the Trail Library doing it alone.
2. Bring together four stakeholders who will be positively inclined toward each other when the project is done.

3. In the political arena, the College is controversial so this project will build a bridge between the two communities. Castlegar and Trail can be competitive and anything I can do to help may bring the communities together.

The agreement spells out:

1. Whose newspapers we will use
2. Who will spend hours and hours flattening and checking the papers
3. Who will ship the papers to Vancouver
4. How will the invoice be paid
5. How will the project be promoted once it is done?

There is a side benefit in that the newspaper agreed to fund the ongoing microfilming when the big costs of 1997 – 2004 are paid.

Project 3: Broadening the literacy community

Of course, we work on literacy a lot and in 2004, we decided to create a reading festival called "Let's Read." This festival included many organizations – the family and adult literacy associations, School district, the Toastmaster's club, we drew on Writers in Libraries, we created events, contests, Caught you reading! Program, and we got support from the local

power company FortisBC, who funded the project. In return for their funding, we gave them extensive advertising, from our website, newspaper fliers, posters, bookmarks, anything we could think of.

With many organizations contributing program, this can be a complex project to manage. The agreement spells out:

- Who is in charge of money and how it will be spent. Important to get agreement on this.
- What programs will take place and who is in charge and where they will be held. Bit of a tussle, as the literacy people wanted the events held at the College and we wanted them in the Library.
- How the PR will be done – we had a conflict in the beginning about the literacy association, which was not referred to properly, with its full name and including the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy. The conflict was also around the Literacy Associations not getting enough coverage compared with the library. It is important to be sensitive about this kind of thing.
- In the first year, there was also a bit of annoyance with some of the team members suddenly not showing up to meetings, or not doing what they said they would do. It's very important to know your team members and have essential projects handled by people who are absolutely reliable.

The reading festival is going into its third year now, and offers many events for all ages, including author readings, Caught you Reading!, workshops for parents for how they can support their children's reading, and just general marketing on the desirability and benefits of reading.

Project 4: Celebrating Trail's Italian heritage

Trail has a very large Italian community, and in 2001 was celebrating its centennial year. The chair of the Friends of the Library decided to create a cookbook called Trail Cooks Italian. This is much more successful than the normal community cookbook, because it draws on Trail's heritage and Italian cooking. So far we have sold 4,000 copies, raising nearly $30,000 for the Trail Library. What made it successful were two things: drawing on the interests of people who used to live in Trail as a nostalgia book, and the ability to sell the cookbook at our famous Italian restaurant, the Colander. I can't stress this enough that is important to intuit the interests of the community and draw on the magic of bringing diverse stakeholders together.

Project 5: Municipal relations

The hospital issue is huge for Trail. When the IHA consolidated health

services, it chose Trail as a health centre.   It was bitterly disputed in our

area and essential that Trail develope good services. I was able to sit on a

municipal committee to deal with issues around information,

transportation and residency for people coming into Trail from other areas

for health care. I think in any community development approach it is

essential to participate in cross-sector committees like this, that aren't

managed by the Library, but in which the Library becomes a player along

with many influential community members.   Librarians are smart, they

have a lot to offer, to bring to the table. The Library helped create a flier

that would be distributed outside the area, and a list of hotels for the area.

There are many committees like this, the Rotary being an obvious choice.

<u>There are many Other Examples of projects:</u>

   In Trail, we have supported many organizations in many ways. The

   Chamber of Commerce, health agencies, and service clubs, have all

   benefited from our ability to bring resources to the table.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Now as never before it is time for action, for collaborative investment in

our communities. Libraries and their communities and partners, must

work together with governments and other key players to invest in the

capacities of our rural communities. The fundamental success of our

province depends upon the capacities of its residents, communities, municipalities and others to play an effective role in local economic development.

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