Annotated Bibliography: Community Partnerships and Public Libraries  
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Introduction  

Public libraries have a great history and strength in forming community partnerships. Community partnerships have the benefit of improving the well-being of the community and the library by combining resources, creating collective problem solving, re-emphasizing public libraries as community space and revitalizing and re-energizing the library space. This annotated bibliography is a representative list of books and articles that include case studies of community partnerships, methods of community analysis, strategic planning ideas and effective theories and visions for partnerships. The case studies range from children’s programming to finding funding for library facilities to joint-use library spaces. Forging community partnerships is a tried and true method for public libraries to reflect community needs and wants as well as a way for public libraries to be forward thinking and future ready.  


Peggy Barry, Community Services Librarian at Naperville Public Library in Illinois, has provided a description of her library’s “Show Us Your Library Card, Naperville!” campaign, suggesting that engaging the local community can be done simply and still create positive results. Naperville’s library asked local businesses if they would be willing to provide discounts at their establishments throughout the month of September (National Library Card Month), if patrons showed them their library card. The library ultimately increased their number of patrons’ visits to the library and received positive responses from businesses that chose to participate in the program. This article is a great resource because it provides an appendix including the campaign’s program survey, the cover letter sent to all local businesses, partnership agreement form and promotional materials. However, the article provides links to electronic resources that are now broken and there is currently no information about this program on Naperville Public Library’s current website.  


This book takes a holistic approach to injecting a new vitality into libraries with a few chapters devoted solely to community partnerships. Points of interest include methods of outreach to specific communities, in-depth interviews with current librarians accompanying each chapter and the wonderfully insightful chapter titled, “Helping the Community Achieve its Aspirations.” Other subjects in the book include marketing, library as place and library 2.0. The portion on community partnerships has sections on shared programming, space and staff and references Crowther and Trott’s book, Partnering with Purpose: A Guide to Strategic Partnership Development for Libraries and Other Organizations, including a take on their equation of levels of partnerships with dating relationships. The Thriving Library includes a meaty bibliography coming in at 30 pages of subcategorized references and resources. In fact, 1/3 of this book consists of its extensive references, notes, the qualitative responses of 29 librarians to the author’s presented strategies for creating a thriving library and various other appendices that provide additional resources to its readers. All the provided resources, make it a great jumping off point for librarians interested in revitalizing their library and establishing lasting community partnerships.
This article provides an international perspective to community partnerships and public libraries from author, Carolyn Bourke, who is the community outreach librarian for children and youth at the Fairfield City Library Service in Sydney, Australia. Her article is focused on three types of community partnerships - businesses, government agencies and children’s organizations with the partnerships primarily focusing on literacy efforts, storytimes and employment services for teens and adults. She sites reduced funding for United States libraries as a compelling example and reason for public libraries to look for creative ways to stay relevant, financially stable and of good service to the community. Ms. Bourke encourages librarians to not react with fear to naysayers that claim the advent of Google renders the public library obsolete, but to be proactive in participating with our own local communities. Her article includes the varying funding concerns of libraries in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia and even includes the idea of creating international library partnerships.


This is a quick article that talks specifically about engaging the community in the process of developing and financing new library buildings. Two public libraries in Florida’s Marion County Public Library System, the Bellevue branch and the Dunnellon branch, planned to construct new buildings despite the lack of state-funded library construction grants available. The branches did outreach to their community through local media sources about the need for space and funding and they received positive responses from the community including a family willing to donate 5 acres of their land as a location for the new library. The article’s highlight is its bullet point suggestions for: planning for construction, finding land, getting building enhancements, and grand opening celebrations. Another strong takeaway from this article is the reminder of the importance of the Friends of the Library and all they have to offer in strengthening the library financially and through community outreach.


Dr. David Carr, retired professor from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s School of Information and Library Science, brings his impassioned vision of the strength of and ties between communities and cultural institutions to his book, The Promise of Cultural Institutions. As G. Rollie Adams states in his foreword, Dr. Carr provides us with a “why to” book in a market filled with “how to.” The book focuses on individuals, communities and cultural institutions coming together to preserve cultural memory and create community dialogue. His eloquent prose serve as a reminder to librarians that focusing on the root of a community’s desire to learn and how cultural institutions can fulfill those desires is a strong starting point in forging any community partnership. While this book does contain practical ideas for forging community relationships, it’s best use would be for librarians seeking to establish a library/museum’s mission and vision statement and those looking to be inspired by the possibilities of their institution.


Part of a social work in practice series, this book focuses on community capacity, which the authors define as, “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-
being of that community” (p.7). Though this book does not cover the topic of libraries forming community partnerships explicitly, it is an incisive text on community organizing that can easily translate into practice guidelines for a public library. *Building Community Capacity* covers neighborhood revitalization, social agency, leadership development, community organizing strategies and an appendix of contemporary case examples. Literature on social work practice, specifically that of community organizing, is a substantial resource for librarians seeking an understanding of community analysis, meeting community needs and developing rapport with community members.


Janet Crowther and Barry Trott have provided us with a very practical (perhaps business-like) guide to forging community partnerships in their writing of *Partnering with Purpose*. Both authors are librarians on staff at the Williamsburg (VA) Regional Library, and come to this writing with 30 years worth of library experience between the two of them. Their strategic plan covers every step of the way from building a strong foundation within the library to composing letters of agreement to successfully overcoming challenges created by the partnership process. The book strives to be a guide for creating successful, long-lasting, two-sided equal partnerships between libraries and community organizations and it means to prepare you as best as it can for these relationships. The book comes complete with a thorough list of contents, index and suggestions for further reading on partnerships. The text will help take libraries from a reactive position and give them the tools to be pro-active in forging new community partnerships.


Betsy Diamant-Cohen, a current children’s services librarian, has put together this slim volume highlighting 18 innovative partnerships formed between children’s programs at public libraries and community organizations, law enforcement, academic institutions, children’s museums, cultural institutions and businesses. One of the most compelling collaborations the book unveils is between Marin County Free Library, San Rafael Public Library and San Quentin State Prison. Their program, FATHERS (Fathers As Teachers: Helping, Encouraging, Reading and Supporting), provides literacy programming for incarcerated fathers including teaching storytelling skills, donated books for the children of these men and established monthly storytimes (p. 42-43). A program for mothers was also instituted after the success of the FATHERS program. Each short, yet detailed program description, from various public libraries across the United States and Canada, includes information about the authors’ backgrounds and most include step-by-step guides and images with reference lists here or there. The structure of this book is clear and inviting and one could imagine a children’s librarian being able to fit reading these inspiring ideas into his/her busy schedule.


This PR handbook is a savvy guide to marketing libraries that retains a level of integrity that should abate the fears a public librarian may feel when faced with advertising their library. The book takes a “meet the patron where they are at approach” in developing positive PR models and also remains cognizant of our ever-changing means of reaching out to patrons. Facebook, Twitter and podcasts are all covered as modes of outreach and the book also includes a chapter on gaming at the library. The text is replete with step-by-step tactics and case examples of effective outreach. What is most impressive
here is the book’s focus on conducting true community assessment and respectfully incorporating community members into these outreach processes without a hint of exploitation. It was published in 2009 by the ever reputable American Library Association.


Mason Library at Keene State College and Keene Public Library formed a partnership in 1991 during a time of downtown revitalization in their city of Keene. They are neither a joint-use library space nor part of a large consortium of libraries, instead they are simply two library systems a ½ mile from each other in New Hampshire that was structured simply upon a positive professional relationship between the two library’s directors. The article is filled with details including the exact dollar amount paid for the new joint automation system for their catalog (and who paid for what percentage) and how they resolved differences in their library policies. But, the main focus is not just the practical aspects of their partnership, but the level of good will that developed between the two libraries and their community members, including this tidbit- “a KPL staff member even wrote a song to not only deal with everyone's concerns, but to also build community among the staff of the two libraries” (p. 626). Both authors are librarians affiliated with the Mason Library at Keene State College. For another good article on a town/gown (university) partnerships, read:


Author, Chrystie Hill, formerly worked as a librarian at Seattle Public Library and now runs a non-profit tech company that assists public libraries in their integration of technology and technological services into their service model. Her book advocates for librarians to conduct outreach not only within the library, but also out in the community and through newly available technologies and she supplies tools specific to each mode of outreach. While providing practical guidelines, steps and ideas, Ms. Hill’s book is firmly rooted in theoretical concepts like social capital espoused in such writings as Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Her joy of the phrase “libraries build communities” is present throughout this text as she deftly integrates interviews and additional qualitative feedback from librarians and patrons into her guide. This is another great (and recent) publication from the American Library Association.


Author, Beth Hovius, is responsible for creating the first community partnership for Hamilton Public Library (Hamilton, Canada) 22 years prior to the publication of this article and she currently serves as the library’s Director of Public Services and Collections. The city of Hamilton has long been devoted to community partnerships and the province of Ontario began requiring all organizations to have community partners before they could receive any grant money. The Hamilton Public Library system has become so recognized as a valuable community partner that the 20 or so organizations they partner with each year seeks them out. And seeing her list of reasons why public libraries make such good partners- credibility, lack of perceived agenda, reputation of honesty and librarians possessing strong skills sets, to name a few- it seems no wonder that organizations seek out their partnership year after
year. This serves as a strong reminder of the value of public libraries, when much of library science literature is focused on the possible end of libraries. The remainder of the article contains descriptions of eleven of the library’s partnerships and what was learned from each partnership. Ms. Hovius concludes with a reminder about remaining true to the library’s core values, making good use of the many skills library employees have to offer and her last note that, “finally when the partnership is running, savour the results. It will all be worth it if your community is a better place for your efforts” (p. 223).


*Library Contests* is part of the “how-to-do-it manual” series distributed by Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., who exclusively publishes books for information professionals. The book suggests the creation of contests in libraries as a way of creating community interest, strengthening or forging community partnerships and as a means to get people through the door. It is a good primer for new libraries, libraries experiencing a bit of a downturn in visitors and for libraries generally looking to create some new buzz. The chapters provide very thorough step-by-step guides to creating contests including checklists, helpful tips, four model examples of library contests and even what to do if your contest fails. Consider using this book to help your library establish its logo by winningly integrating community members into the process or for encouraging participation in your summer reading program by hosting a prize drawing.


This book provides thirteen case examples of library partnerships established between the Broward County Library in Florida and its local community. Examples range from collaborating with an arts center to a small business resource center to various academic institutions and all examples include an honest list of successes and challenges faced in the partnership. Broward County’s partnerships and this text are consistently referred to within other sources on community partnerships and public libraries, making it a go-to text of classic examples for librarians looking to forge new and creative partnerships with organizations in their community. This text also includes a link to an electronic resource that contains the detailed agreements created between Broward County Library and five of their community partners.


Sarah McNicol, organizer of the first conference on joint-use libraries, has written a book specifically focused on one type of community partnership that libraries can engage in, joint-use libraries. This text is a standout due to its global coverage of this phenomenon. It is part of the Chandon Publisher’s series of books “aimed at the busy information professional…. specifically commissioned to provide the reader with an authoritative view of current thinking” (title page verso). The text examines the future and importance of joint-use libraries along with a view of how they are being utilized today. The appendix contains a chart of the 28 worldwide joint-use libraries discussed with their corresponding community partner and URL address. There is also an extensive list of references and suggestions for further reading as well as a list of library standards broken down by type of library (public, academic, etc.) and location (United States, New Zealand, UK, etc.). This book is perfect for someone seeking an international perspective on community partnerships for libraries and an understanding of the possibilities of joint-use libraries.

This article started out with a simple idea that created a great benefit for local non-profit organizations, the local community and the public library itself. In seeking out information for their patrons, the librarians at Vigo County Public Library in Terre Haute, Indiana noticed that many local non-profit agencies did not have functional websites, which made finding out information about their agencies difficult for the librarians and virtually impossible for their patrons. The librarians reached out to the non-profits and offered to assist them in their websites’ development, which resulted in free website support for the non-profits and ease of access to information for the librarians and their patrons. To address feasibility concerns, the librarians created a simplistic template to be used for all the non-profits with a focus on basic information only (so they wouldn’t crash their library’s server). They were also careful to limit their outreach to non-profits that fit the library’s mission. The article closes with a list of six examples of their web design, listing out the non-profit organization and their corresponding URL addresses. Once you move past the somewhat silly name of this article, you will discover an innovative idea that utilizes the skills of librarians to create strong community resources.


Laredo Public Library (LPL) and University of Texas at San Antonio’s Health Science Center (UT HSC) decided to join together to respond to the health needs of their local community. They sought out additional community partners in the City of Laredo’s Parks and Leisure Department and the local Health Department, to create a summer program promoting health information to local children. With funding from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine- South Central Office, their programming included a children’s health fair and the library’s bookmobile visiting eight local summer camps with health-related materials in tow. The public librarians with the help of a local school librarian provided programming to the children at the camps. At the children’s health fair, local grocery stores provided refreshments, community partners had booths, the local PBS station supplied a character, Piggley Winks, from their children’s television programs and LPL’s children’s mascot, Reading Bear, made an appearance. The article, written by two staff members at LPL and one at UT HSC, concludes with information about the program’s budget and lessons they learned from the partnership. Partnerships for a Healthy Community provides a great example of a public library working with multiple community partners to resolve a prevalent need in the local community.


This is another publication of the respected American Library Association with the advantage of being published quite recently in 2010. Editor, Carol Smallwood, asked her authors to keep it concise, so with Librarians as Community Partners readers are offered 66 short and sweet entries about community partnerships by 34 librarians from across the United States working in public libraries, academic libraries, special collections and as faculty members in library sciences’ programs. This volume is not only all-encompassing in terms of authorship, but also in its coverage of the varying forms of community collaboration- from outreach to specific communities, considering joint-use libraries and developing partnerships with local community organizations. The book takes the perspective of the librarian his/herself creating partnerships with the local community in such arenas as senior services, public schools, correctional facilities, local media, arts organizations and book festivals. A special feature of this text is its focus on diversity outreach, which is an essential tool to meet the ever-changing needs of our library patrons.

This article walks the reader through the step-by-step plan of a community college and a public library becoming a joint use library called, College Hill Library, in Westminster, Colorado, from its beginnings in 1994 to the publication of this article in 2006. It covers a variety of concerns including the history of the partnership, where the libraries looked to for precedent, the library building itself, staff reactions, fundraising efforts, marketing and details of the agreement between the two library systems. The focus is less theoretical, more operational and would provide a library/librarian with insights into what it takes to form a successful joint-use library. The authors are refreshingly open about the opportunities and many challenges that this partnership has created. This article really excels due to its inclusion not only of the pros and cons of creating this kind of library partnership, but honest feedback about the partnership thus far from the heads of both the public library and college system library.


Kenneth Williment, Community Development Manager at Halifax Public Libraries, set out to find out why some community members across the country of Canada were not utilizing the public library’s services. In this revolutionary article, he offers a new approach to the provision of library services by asking librarians to step away from the “traditional service planning model” (firmly recognizing its flaws) and trying a new one he calls the “community-led service planning model”. In doing outreach with the community, he and his colleagues found that while librarians feel they are being inclusive, they are often excluding members of society by using library jargon, charging fines and “trying to educate” people. They also found that patrons also had their “own” social barriers that made the library difficult for them to access. Williment’s community-led service planning model provides for community integration and input at every level of library planning- truly forming a solid partnership with local community members. This is a strong resource for librarians looking to re-evaluate their modes of community analysis and outreach.
Community Partnerships Toolkit

Three Key Factors
- Act with integrity
- Know your mission and goals
- Conduct continual community assessment

Be Proactive, not reactive
- Partner where it counts, not just where it's easy
- Strategic planning: identify potential partners ahead of time
- Don't just show up when you need something, be supportive over time
- Be cognizant of who you are and your role in the situation (especially when you are working with historically under-represented groups)

Keep it Local
- Partners have a stronger investment in the community
- Community ownership
- Greater reflect needs of the local community and library patrons = larger impact overall
- Shows you are truly listening to a community’s needs
- Be cognizant of local government
- Get involved with the community
  - read local newspapers
  - be integrated leaders within the community
  - provide support with other methods
  - establish regular community contacts

What to Bring to the Table
- Library’s mission, vision and core values
- Short-term and long-term library plans
- Who the library serves
- Statistics
- Current programs and services information
- Budget
- Staffing
- Funding and board structures
- Role of volunteers
- Knowledge of other library partners
- Partnership program requirements

Adapted from: