

Serving the Whole Community: An Outreach Model for Reaching All Children and Families

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Introduction

“Our team has a charge we were given when our team was created—to find our service gaps and help fill them. To make sure we are getting our services out to every library patron in [the city], whether or not they've ever actually set foot in our libraries. So, really we are seeing the whole city as our patrons instead of just the people who are coming into the library.”

—X, children’s librarian with [Name] Department, J Library

What do you think of when you hear the term “outreach”? A bookmobile wending its way through a rural community to deliver books to children and families? A summer reading event for children in a sunny park full of lively activities that complement a meal delivery program? Library staff offering a storytime and literacy program in a shelter for families experiencing homelessness? Outreach is all this and much more. Libraries are transforming how they engage with children and families in underserved communities by going outside of their walls and meeting families where they are with innovative, learning-based, and family-focused programs with the purpose of building relationships within the communities that surround the libraries.

What is outreach?

Beth Crist, youth and family services consultant at the Colorado State Library, in her chapter on Outreach and Partnerships in the book *Create, Innovate, and Serve: A Radical Approach to Children’s and Youth Services*, defines outreach this way: “The term ‘outreach’ is sometimes used to include any activity conducted outside the library walls, such as presenting a school assembly to promote the upcoming summer learning program or developing a partnership with the local Boys and Girls club to offer joint programs in their facilities” (2019, n.p.). A scan of the data we collected in our study (detailed below) yielded the word cloud shown in figure 1. This graphic clearly demonstrates the prominence of certain terms: outside, programs, people, services, reach, provide—many of which also appear in Beth’s definition. Putting this together, when we talk about outreach in this white paper, we mean an approach to providing programs and services outside library walls, out in the community, often with partners, to reach people—especially people who do not or cannot come into the library—who are part of the greater community served by the library.



Fig. 1 Word cloud of participant definitions of outreach

Why do outreach?

What is the purpose of having an outreach program as part of your library's program plan? Our participants identified a number of goals for their outreach programs, including:

- overcoming barriers,
- serving those who can't come into the library,
- reaching those who are not currently being reached by in-library services,
- providing awareness of what the library has to offer,
- leveling the playing field through access to library services,
- building goodwill,
- meeting people where they are, and more.

The common theme throughout these various goals is the library's desire to be a part of the community that surrounds the library. Whether it's through long-term partnerships or short-term programs and services, libraries are looking for ways to bring their resources to the patrons who need them most. This white paper will share the findings from the study we conducted, profile of several programs that offer innovative, strategic approaches to conducting outreach and overcoming challenges, and frame them within a research-based model of the stages of outreach as we see them, which you can use to help build your own plan for reaching beyond your walls and out into your communities.

Background

Libraries are well positioned to support learning for the whole family through their programs and services (Celano & Neuman, 2015). Hence, the field has placed an emphasis on family engagement as a way for libraries to provide support to families through programs, education, and resources. *Libraries for the 21st Century: It's a Family Thing*, a partnership between the Public Library Association and Global Family Research Project, has worked to understand how

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libraries are engaging families. The project introduced The 5Rs Framework—Reach out, Raise up, Reinforce, Relate, and Reimagine—“five important processes that build successful family engagement pathways” (Casper, Jeske, & Graham, 2016). The National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests that family engagement should occur as a continuous partnership between families and the child’s learning environments. By placing an emphasis on engagement, organizations start from the understanding that all families are working to support their children’s learning and development. The focus then becomes the methods by which informal learning organizations can partner with families to support the learning and development of their young children (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moody, 2009).

Recent research on the two most prevalent public library programs for children and families—storytimes and summer reading/learning—has revealed that they do support learning. Storytimes in particular provide a strong foundation in early learning through an intentional focus on early literacy skills in the development and delivery of the program (Campana et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2018). Furthermore, storytimes are sites of an array of early learning domains such as STEM and social emotional and others, and the actors and participants in these programs embody important roles in facilitating the learning process for children (Campana, 2018). The research on summer reading has concluded that summer reading programs, which include a variety of literacy activities, should target children in high-need populations who could most benefit from the support provided by the programs (Dydia, Piasta, & Justice, 2015). In addition to these two programs, libraries offer a variety of other programs that seek to provide educational and enjoyable experiences for young children and school-aged children. Libraries have also recognized the importance of helping parents and caregivers to support learning for the children in their care through a variety of initiatives and programs such as Every Child Ready to Read @ your library—first edition (ECRR1) & second edition (ECRR2). These parent education initiatives help parents and caregivers understand how to support their children’s early literacy development (Neuman & Celano, 2012; Meyers & Henderson, 2004). While libraries have long focused on learning for the child and learning for the parents and caregivers, they have only recently realized their potential in supporting intergenerational learning for the whole family.

Because of their family engagement practices, the public library is considered an important resource for supporting families in underserved communities (Neuman & Celano, 2012). However, many family engagement-focused programs and services are often primarily offered in-house, putting those who do not come into the library at a disadvantage in terms of access to learning opportunities and support. Public libraries are looking for ways to reach these families, who probably need the support most of all (Neuman & Celano, 2012; Prendergast, 2011), because of the variety of barriers they experience when trying to access the library.

The 2009 Public Library Survey found that, of 100 metro areas, the lowest attendance rates of children’s services at the public library were located in nine metro areas that had the highest

levels of child poverty and the highest numbers of children of immigrants (Swan & Manjarrez, 2011). Though some libraries have identified the needs of, and are working to reach and serve, families in different underserved communities outside of the library walls, these programs and services differ substantially from library to library. But the field needs a broad understanding of the types of programs and services that exist outside of library walls, what these programs might have in common, and what other libraries learn from these efforts to apply similar programs elsewhere. Aspects of these specific programs and services could offer great potential for helping libraries across the nation that seek to reach underserved groups in their communities.

Our Research

In 2015, researchers Mills and Campana conducted focus groups with prominent librarians and library administrators in the children's services field to uncover their essential research needs. Reaching families who do not come into the library was a prevalent topic that surfaced in several ways. A number of library staff expressed the importance of serving and supporting these families, but they felt uncertain of how to actually reach and engage with them. One participant shared,

We [the library] are trying to go out to all of these different places to reach these parents who do not come in. The parents that do come in are generally comfortable with being the educational leader for their child. They are interested in educating their child and so they bring their children into the library. In order to reach the parents that don't understand or are not comfortable being the educational leader, we have to go to them, where they are.

Some participants discussed their innovative efforts in this area with trying to find “*more nimble ways to get out to families that are not coming into the library,*” such as building relationships with early learning community organizations as a way to reach and understand the needs of underserved families. Ultimately, these library staff and their libraries are actively searching for and testing various practices that can be used to reach and serve families who do not come into the library.

To support libraries' efforts in this area, we wanted to gain a broader, more holistic understanding of how libraries were going out into community locations to reach and serve children and families in underserved communities. To do this, we designed Project LOCAL (Library Outreach as a Community Anchor in Learning), an IMLS Planning grant, which endeavored to understand how public libraries are taking their programs and services out into community locations to reach and serve families in underserved communities.

Our study was guided by the desire to know: *'How, if at all, are public libraries currently reaching beyond their walls to serve families in underserved communities who do not come into and utilize the library?'* This overarching question was informed by these specific questions:

- How, if at all, are libraries working to understand the needs of families in underserved communities who do not come into and utilize the library?
- What are libraries offering in terms of programs and services that take place outside of library walls to reach families in underserved communities who do not come into and utilize the library? How, if at all, are libraries incorporating their understanding of these families' needs to develop these programs and services?
- What do libraries perceive as challenges or obstacles to developing and delivering programs/services outside of library walls for families in underserved communities who do not come into and utilize the library?

The study was made up of four phases, which together involved more than 160 library staff and administrators from small, medium, and large libraries in 27 states across the United States. These four phases allowed us to take a holistic approach to understanding outreach programs.

1. Three focus groups at ALA Annual to gather initial information on how libraries are reaching out;
2. Twenty-one virtual interviews to gather deeper, more specific information on how libraries are reaching out;
3. A national survey to gather broad information on how libraries are reaching out;
4. Ten virtual follow-up interviews to gather more specific information on how libraries plan, deliver, and assess their programs.

Outreach Model and Case Studies

From these various avenues of data collection, an overall framework to outreach program development and delivery began to take shape. We learned about libraries that devoted time and energy to gathering data and engaging with their communities through that data-gathering process; libraries that cultivated and nurtured partnerships big and small to meet community needs and avoid doing work that had already been done by someone else; programs and services (both active and passive) that are transforming communities in all kinds of ways through innovative delivery approaches; and assessment strategies that, with varying levels of success, were attempting to portray the complexity and depth of programs' successes and challenges in narratives meant for sustainability through funding and continued support. As we took a look at all our data, we developed the following model (see figure 2) to help us understand the relationships between the components of engage, cultivate, provide, and assessment, in the hopes that we might help to portray outreach in a holistic way.

We will explore the components of this framework to give you an idea of what we mean by each of these terms. With each component, we will offer case studies, ten in all drawn from the 130 different outreach programs at big and small libraries across the country, representing the urban, rural, and suburban areas that we learned about in our study. We want to highlight these because

they offer clear examples of our holistic model of outreach. We'll offer some general information about each library and their programs, highlight their outreach work, and then describe how these libraries connect back to our model. Our hope is that you will find some inspiration and information in these case studies that you can bring back to your library to help grow and sustain your own outreach work.



Fig. 2. Model of outreach development (Campana, Mills, & Martin, 2018)

ENGAGE

Engage refers to learning about the world outside of the library. Libraries have been employing a variety of methods to engage with and learn about their communities. In our study, we have learned that the tools librarians use to assess community need generally fall into two large categories—existing data and emergent data.

Existing data refers to census statistics, school-related data such as free and reduced lunch rates, test scores, local community data, superintendent data, and more. Many libraries are already collecting this data and using it, for instance, to demonstrate need for a storytime program in preschools that feed into schools with high need. At a mountain library system, a library staff member wanted to build a reading readiness program that incorporated the local preschools. She first determined which preschools were in a particular service area. She then looked at the elementary schools that enrolled children from those preschools to see if the schools were in a high needs category, looking at free and reduced lunch percentages, test scores, English-language learner populations, etc. Based on that initial data collection, she then contacted the site and presented her program, with the intent to build a partnership and go from there. Mountain

library system's outreach program, called Reading Readiness Outreach program, has existed for several years now, built on this approach of using existing data to help identify potential sites and understand how to target and tailor a program to meet these identified needs.

Emergent data refers to personal conversations with community members, leaders, individuals, and parents; knowing the neighborhood through explorations—walking or driving; and talking with those in community organizations such as churches, food banks, home schooling groups, parent advising groups, targeted focus groups, community partners, and community focus groups. An outreach strategy for your library can begin through this kind of need discovery, and engage with the world inside and outside the library through programs, services, and collections and most importantly, through people.

We learned that two libraries are using different types of data to guide their outreach efforts to children and families.

Library System, mid-Atlantic state

The Y library is a multi-branch system, begun by a gift from a steel magnate to the Mayor of city in 1881, that serves a community of around 2.6 million people. To develop their outreach efforts, Y library engages with their community in multiple ways. When a children's specialist begins working at a new location, they are encouraged to learn as much as possible about the community. To help with this, some branch locations will take a new staff person on a tour of the neighborhood and highlight some of the locations and events in the neighborhood. Others just go on a drive around the neighborhood and identify possible partnerships. In addition, the children's staff created a spreadsheet that lists all of the outreach they have done over the years, and then they map it out on a Policy Map (<https://www.policymap.com>) so they can track the outreach that they're doing by neighborhood. Policy Map lists all the non-profits and all of the schools in the area using available data, so it helps to provide a specialized view of the community. Hence, when new staff members come into their locations, they can look on the spreadsheet and the Policy Map to see what outreach efforts have taken place over the past years. This helps them to be more strategic in learning about their community and developing outreach programs and services.

When the children's specialists are learning about their community, they begin by figuring out how much time that they have for outreach. Then they identify places in their community (with a priority placed on public schools and Head Start locations) and reach out to contact them. Y library will also host resource fairs at the library—another place where staff can connect with community partners. Once they have made that connection with a community partner, the staff member will follow up with them to understand the community partner's needs and begin to establish a relationship with them. All of these efforts are done with the goal of developing a

partnership with these community organizations through which they can build outreach opportunities. This kind of relationship-building is key to gathering emergent data.

One example of this engagement approach is y library's monthly storytimes in homeless shelters, offered by Y Library's Early Learning [name] team. This is an outreach team responsible for providing regular storytimes to early learning locations. The storytimes in shelters are offered for both the children and their parents because they recognize that the storytimes can benefit not only the children, but the parents, as well. As a result, they make sure to always provide literacy tips during the program and a parent sheet, which includes the books, literacy tips, and some of the activities that were shared during the program. In addition to the monthly storytimes, Y Library works with a community partner who hosts events for populations experiencing homelessness. Y Library often participates in these events by bringing summer reading materials and fun activities for children and families to the summer event. The work Y Library's specialists do to build relationships and get to know their neighborhoods has paved the way for this important work reaching some of the neediest families.

Library system, Midwest state

The b library, which will soon have a number of branches, has a cadre of librarians and associates called the [name] Team who take daily STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering Arts, and Math) and early literacy storytimes for children and families into Head Start programs, laundromats, WIC Centers and, soon, pediatric centers. The team has been incredibly successful in growing their outreach efforts through the different ways they have engaged with their community.

At the beginning of growing their outreach efforts, they were asked to focus on specific zip codes that were considered a priority by the c city. They contacted their target organization, Head Start, by cold calling them and sharing the services that the [name] Team could provide. It took some time to build credibility, but they emphasized the benefits of library programs. Building on their success at getting into Head Start locations, they realized they could extend their services into laundromats, so they used the same cold calling technique, which resulted in offering storytimes in five laundromats. Those laundromats then connected them with the LaundryCares Foundation, which got them into an additional nine laundromats. The WIC storytimes came about through a different route. When WIC reached out and asked the library to offer a single program, the [name] team instead proposed a more robust partnership with weekly engagement to reinforce early learning and early literacy concepts and to provide both modeling and greater access for parents. B library believes in breaking down barriers and streamlining services for people—when they're at a laundromat or at a WIC center, they can be benefiting from library services, too.

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Each STEAM storytime has a theme and, like most storytimes, includes songs, books, rhymes, and fingerplays, but these sessions also introduce particular STEAM concepts to the preschool audience, such as colors and color mixing, sorting, body part identification, and more. The librarians also share STEAM talking points to introduce the concepts in an approachable way for a preschool audience. Instead of a craft activity, the team brings in hands-on STEAM activities and allows time for the children to play and engage with the manipulatives. In Head Starts, they use more of a traditional storytime format, but in WIC Centers and laundromats, the facilitators use more of a free-flowing program that welcomes people as they come and go. Because these storytimes rely on drop-in attendance in non-traditional locations, advertising is essential for getting the word out to the communities. The team places fliers in the branch libraries that are closest to the laundromats where the programs will occur and also distribute them to the laundromat owners to share with customers. They also hand out quarter sheets to parents during storytimes with the weekly details for STEAM storytimes in the laundromats as well as those at the nearest library branch, and they list the information on the library's website as well. For the WIC programs, the library has created fliers that include both the library logo and the WIC logo, inviting families to STEAM storytimes. The broad goals for this program are “to meet people outside the walls of the library [and] take the library to where the people need it to be.”

The library staff assess these outreach programs in a variety of ways: they survey Head Start teachers at the end of storytime that seeks to understand whether the children enjoyed the program, learned some STEAM concepts, and whether the participants learned more about what the library offers. The [name] Team meticulously tracks statistics for the WIC and laundromat programs, and they fill out self-reflection surveys after each program. They have also created a guide in collaboration with Libraries without Borders and Too Small to Fail for other libraries wanting to offer laundromat storytimes.

Summary

You can see from these cases that engaging with your community can lead to all sorts of exciting opportunities. For the Y Library, they used emergent data to connect with local homeless shelters and offer programs that could reach and serve the families and children staying there. B library relied on a combination of both existing data—zip codes and particular Head Start locations, as well as emergent data regarding laundromats and WIC centers to extend their programs and reach out into their communities. Engaging can look different depending on your priorities, budget, and community partners—it's important to take the time to lay the groundwork for your outreach strategy.

CULTIVATE

The act of cultivating in outreach is all about building relationships with partners, either existing or new, and your communities. Going out into your communities to offer program and services often requires partnerships to help you gain access to the community, locate a site where you can

offer your program or service, and connect with people so that your efforts will be well received. Through Project LOCAL, we found that libraries are cultivating partnerships with a wide variety of community organizations to create, design, and deliver their outreach programs and services. These partnerships are often built in a variety of ways. Many libraries used existing partners to help them build a new outreach program/service, but others built completely new partnerships around outreach programs. Some intentionally chose their partner and worked to build that specific relationship from the ground up because of their unique contributions to the program/service, whereas in other situations the partner approached the library about playing a role in the program/service, and the partnership emerged from the request.

These partnerships can also take a variety of different forms. Y library talked about their outreach partnerships in two different ways: relationship-based outreach and project-based outreach. Relationship-based outreach was described as partnerships through which the library might have multiple outreach programs and services, making it a deeper relationship with the partner. Many libraries have this type of partnership with their local school system, as they share many outreach programs and services with them. Project-based outreach was described as a partnership around a specific project that doesn't extend outside of the project—more limited in scope than a relationship-based one.

In addition to partnerships, libraries are also building long-term relationships with specific communities in which the outreach program/service takes place to help support the success of the community. The P Library uses Neighborhood Ambassadors to support the success of their Words at Play program, a large-scale early learning outreach initiative. The Neighborhood Ambassadors are community members, paid a small stipend by the library, to publicize and spread the word about their programs and services. Strategies for connecting directly with the community like this are important because they can help to break down barriers between the library and specific communities.

A Library, western state

The A Library opened in 1879 for the S city and serves a population of more than 870,000. A Library's program with the National Park Service, specifically the [name] park, is one example of cultivating a strong partnership with a community organization. Initiated by a former intern from the parks who got in touch with the library around the park's centennial, the program grew from an interest on the part of the parks in working with community partners as part of the national celebration of the centennial. What A Library discovered through this partnership was a shared alignment around reaching underserved communities in the area and providing shared experiences in the natural world. A Library is open to figuring out how to do things a little differently to provide real, hands-on experiences for their community beyond the library walls.

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The program involves both an in-library component, with a park ranger coming in and providing educational and informative programming as well as an out-of-the-library component: community members take shuttle buses to the park, where they are met by a guide who offers an informative tour, complete with water and snacks, and an opportunity to explore the natural world outside of the city. The Park Service wanted to target neighborhoods that might have difficulty getting to a local national park or even to the ocean, and they were strategic about meeting their goals of connecting with less traditional park users and harder to reach communities. This unique partnership involves different roles: the library is the welcoming spot, the gathering hub; C Books—local publisher— selects the target book and artwork for the marketing materials and the reading focus of the program; the Park Service provides shuttle and the guided outdoor experience. The library even brought teens in to do a teen think tank and have a group dialogue about what they would want to see on a trailhead and what graphics. Additionally, the library did a mid-course reflection, to help the partner understand why some programs were better attended than others. They rearranged program labels and content to try new things, and eventually designed three different programs, to build on previous success and be an effective partner with the Park Service.

Our North Star for theSs Library is creating community connections through shared experiences. This particular partnership embodies that. It's a very robust partnership built on trust and integrity and has evolved over the past couple of years. When I think about new partnerships with other agencies, I look at this as the model of what it could be, where you're really providing the marketing around it and the engagement and the invitation from the library to meet us here and we're gonna do something together, outside the library walls, and it's gonna be awesome.

A Library's keys to partnership success? Maintaining fluid communication, assigning lead roles to staff to handle different moving parts, making sure they have a solid contact for the partner through continuity on both teams that leads to strong relationships and trust. Furthermore, the program is in alignment with the goal of the library: to engage students over the summer through all ages, all abilities, all-means programming.

D Library, northwest state

The D Library serves a community of nearly 8,000 residents, circulating about 76,000 items a year. The library is located in a Title 1 school area where lots of Hispanic children live and where low-income housing developments are also located. The Hunger Coalition, a local food bank, provides daily summer lunches for children. A few years ago, the Coalition contacted the library to partner with them and provide social programming for the children during the daily summer lunch the Coalition provides. This became a monthly program called Storytime in the Park. The Coalition arrives at the park and sets up their food truck, and the families and children know just what to do. Once they've finished their lunch, the librarians offer the program. The

library has recently added STEM concepts as part of the program, including bringing in beach sand left over from previous flood preparation. Many of the kids had never been to a beach or played in sand so this addition was very popular. “I think we have to remember they’re kids and you gotta have something fun, not just focus on what we’re gonna teach them or help them learn. We have to keep it fun.” The local Kiwanis Club has recently committed to building a shelter for the library, which will provide protection for attendees from the sun during the summer, which may help grow participation. Another partner is the Community Library in ..., a private, non-profit library that relies on donations and philanthropic efforts, which also partners with the Hunger Coalition through their mobile services. D Library applies for funds, lists The ... Library as a partner, and shares resources with them, because they serve the same kids in the valley. D Library also helps with the ... Library’s circulating collection by returning any books that are returned to one library but belong to the other one. Because of the wealth divide between ..., ..., and D Library, the lunch program in the park helps to bring people in who normally don't come into the library. Challenges around staffing are ongoing, but the librarian asks other staff and some Friends volunteers to help out from time to time. The Friends group also helps fund free books to give away to the children who attend, enabling families to build a home library.

Summary

A Library and D Library offer examples of different ways to cultivate community partnerships, especially ones where the partner approaches the library with an opportunity. You can see how in both cases, the libraries worked out roles—either formally or informally—to streamline the work and offer successful, meaningful programming for community members. Communication is key, as is constant evaluation and recognizing where partners can join efforts for maximum impact.

PROVIDE

Many libraries across the country provide innovative programs that remain responsive to their communities. As they identify a location within the community, they must also develop a structure for the program and determine what is required to implement it successfully. Sometimes, the library takes the lead role by completely developing the program, then coordinating with their community partners to figure out where the best location will be and what roles the library and the partners might play. At other times, a partner will approach the library with a programming need or idea and will work with the library to bring the program to fruition. In still other circumstances, a community member will ask that a particular program be developed by the library or will volunteer their own talents and services that can be integrated into the program.

In our national survey, we asked library staff to distinguish between active and passive programs. We define active programs as those that involve group participation by librarians, children, and caregivers within a designated time such as storytime, PrimeTime Family, block play, etc. Passive programs, on the other hand, are open-ended ones that allow children and families to

interact with materials and resources on their own time and at their own pace such as book drop-offs at day care centers, setting up a booth with library materials at a farmer's market, etc. We distinguish between these two types of programs because the resources and personnel required for active programs often outweigh what is needed for passive programs, and it is often also more possible to assess the impact of active programs than it is of passive ones. Notably, library programs are not one-size-fits-all and often depend heavily on the community, the personnel, the partnerships, available locales, etc. We see outreach on a continuum of service and resources, not privileging one type over the other since your library will have strengths in particular areas, and you may find some aspects of outreach easier than others as you build awareness of your library and reach different communities—particular underserved communities. The better your library staff knows the community, the greater the likelihood is that your library can provide outreach programs that matter, and the more the community will see how essential the library is to the life of the community.

E Library, Northwest state

E Library serves a population of nearly 700,000, with 26 branches, a mobile system, and [text extracted for anonymity]. E library provides quite a bit of outreach in the summertime, connected with their Summer of Learning program. Kids are not in school, and foundation money has been available to hire extra staff. Their partners include the local Boys and Girls Club, which serves hundreds of kids; Department of Parks and Recreation; and a local writing and tutoring organization, among others. With the Boys & Girls Club, librarians bring bins of age-appropriate, high interest books with the goal of offering the kids at the club quality reading opportunities in the midst of their various other activities. Librarians have noticed that the kids are excited about reading and pull books out of the bins as soon as they arrive. Moreover, this helps address the fact that many of these kids don't have time to come to the library. Instead, the library brings Summer of Learning programs to them.

The Department of Parks and Recreation offers a free and reduced lunch at a nearby park for families, and the children's librarians come to connect with the families, offer storytimes, and give away books. Many of these families are already coming into the library and are now coming to the park; others don't traditionally come to the library or the park. The librarians already provided various programs, like Zumba with toddlers, which prompted one community member—a yoga teacher—to come forward and suggest a yoga program for kids who might not have access to this kind of activity elsewhere. The library found its own funding for this idea and made it happen, coordinating around the free lunch in the park so that participants in the lunch program could also take part in the yoga program. The librarian provides a storytime for about twenty minutes and then the yoga teacher offers a half-hour session. The program is primarily intended for preschoolers, though some older children attend, too. Attendance was good, and people stayed and read on a parachute after the program ended. This was a community-led idea, and the library conducted some local marketing to spread the word—through a newsletter and

the website. The goals for the program were to offer a literacy component in combination with a physical element; offer interactive programming; do something in the park with people who might not otherwise know about the library; work with a community member, and provide fun. Challenges around communication and scheduling are confronted through flexibility and partner support. But sustainability is still uncertain, as the library works out funding and program details. The librarian detailed various methods of assessment, combining counting the number of attendees with periods of reflection with the community member to ascertain what is going well and what she might want to change going forward. E Library is committed to being out in the community, where kids are, partnering with the parks, and being strategic about when to offer programs that coincide with existing programs like free lunches.

F Libraries, Mountain state

F library district serves a population of about 250,000 residents and circulates about 5 million items per year. One in-depth, long-term outreach program they offer is Reading Readiness. This is a great example of how a program can deepen and expand over time, when given adequate attention and support. As a part of the program, one library staff member, whose position is dedicated to the program, works with a number of preschools in high-need areas to provide early literacy professional development for the teachers in the school.

Their initial efforts to reach out to preschools consisted of just an awareness program through which the library staff member provided early literacy resources and information to the teachers. Over the years the program has transformed from those initial efforts to its current state where the library partners with specific preschools for a year to provide a multi-stage professional development program with teachers and some additional pieces for the families. This shift was done “to build a really comprehensive staff development model that would ultimately help kids be ready to succeed and learn to read when they get to kindergarten.” The program has two main goals: 1) introduce the preschool children to early literacy skills through their teachers’ proficiency, and 2) increase library awareness by building a strong community partnership between the library, the preschools, and families in their community. A decision matrix is used to decide which preschools to include, and the preschools that commit to participating must have their teachers and director sign a coaching contract.

The main professional development piece of the program has four stages across the year that the library staff member works through with the teachers: modeling and demonstration, coaching, small group interactions, and practice time. The family components of the program include events where the library staff member can interact directly with the family members, such as attending preschool events (parent/teacher conferences, fall festivals, etc.); bringing backpack collections (backpacks filled with five books) to the preschool for families to check out; and being present during preschool pickup time to hand out library information and sign families up for library cards.

Professional Development Model	Description
Modeling	The library staff member models early literacy skills for the teachers through storytime at the preschool
Coaching	The library staff member has coaching conversations with the teachers who watched her modeling the early literacy skills in the storytime
Small Group	The library staff member brings the teachers together in a small group where the teachers are able to learn from each other through the dialogue that they have in the small group.
Practice	The teachers are given opportunities to practice the early literacy skills and techniques that they have been learning. To help with this, they receive practice kits that include age-appropriate books and a handout with tips for using the books and suggestions for extension activities. The library staff member also has discussions with each of the teachers during this stage, talking to them about their practice, what they have learned, and what they have questions about.

A strong assessment program is in place to determine the effectiveness of the Reading Readiness Outreach program. At the beginning of the program they started out with a pre/post survey of the teachers to understand what they knew about early literacy at the beginning of the year versus at the end of the year. However, when they realized that the pre/post surveys were not enough, they added teacher observations. The library staff member observes the teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the year; these are used to inform the coaching process by providing insight into the strengths of the teachers and whether they understand what they are working on and how to apply it. As part of the program, the teachers also document what they have worked on and learned, and what they have noticed with their kids, which provides some anecdotal evidence. J Libraries is also in the process of working on a more final evaluation that will include 1) a self-evaluation piece for the teacher that will enable them to reflect on their own skills; 2) an evaluation that the teachers complete to provide feedback for the library staff member on their coaching; and 3) an evaluation for the preschool directors that requests feedback on the program.

Summary

These two cases exemplify both active programs, such as F Library’s Reading Readiness Program, that reaches children through training with their preschool teachers, and passive

programs, such as E library's partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, through which they make age-appropriate bins of books available to the young people who attend. Each approach capitalizes on services and resources that the respective libraries can provide. Additionally, deliberately planned, community-oriented programming that has emerged out of an identified community need can often lead to new partnerships with those who have witnessed how this synergy between the library and the partner can positively impact the community. They will want to partner with the library, too. To maintain programming excellence and ensure that your programming is reaching the goals you have set for it while also meeting the needs of the community members who are attending, knowing how to assess your programs is also essential.

ASSESS

When we talk about assessment, we are referring to the process of gathering information on your programs and services to understand how they are meeting the needs of the communities you serve. While the field uses different terms, like evaluation, measurement, or assessment, to describe these processes, we have chosen to use the term assessment to refer to them. Assessment has gained recognition in the past several years as an important aspect of public library operations. Historically, many libraries have focused on collecting output numbers (program attendance and circulation statistics) and participant satisfaction reports as their measures of assessment (Irwin and St. Pierre 2014).

More recently, though, many in the field have recognized that assessment measures can and should go deeper by examining outcomes and impact (Becker 2015; Irwin and St. Pierre 2014), and should be used for a wider variety of purposes, such as professional development, future program development, advocacy, and more (Mills et al. 2015; Irwin and St. Pierre 2014). In fact, we view assessment of programs and services as a crucial aspect of the program and service lifecycle because it can provide data for advocacy, data on community needs, and data for building more effective services and feeding into professional development. In fact, F Libraries' assessment plan, outlined previously in the PROVIDE section, is a perfect example of an assessment strategy that will provide data for a variety of different purposes, like advocacy, community needs and developing more effective services.

In Project LOCAL we found that many libraries are assessing their outreach programs/services and collecting data for advocacy, future program development, and professional development. Most of the libraries, though, were struggling with how to assess outcomes and impact in a widespread, meaningful way. The participant libraries were primarily using attendance counts, satisfaction measures, and anecdotal evidence. Two additional areas in which libraries were fairly successful with assessment of their outreach efforts were self-reflection and peer discussion, which were mainly used to inform future program development and professional development. For self-reflection the library staff were examining how their program went, what they felt might improve them, and how to go about making those changes. In peer discussion,

multiple library staff were coming together to discuss their programs. Sometimes they might have been discussing programs they worked on together or similar programs that they worked on separately. They used this time to discuss how the programs went and what they wanted to change about them and to ask for advice and feedback.

The following library case studies provide more detailed information around how two libraries are assessing their outreach programs. Use these models to inform the work you do in your communities in understanding some of the ways that you can assess outreach programs and services. However, also recognize that there is a need for additional, innovative ways to assess library programs and services, especially those out in the community. Be creative in developing new ways to assess your programs and services, and don't be afraid to try something new. You can always make changes or do something different if it doesn't work out the way you had envisioned. Ultimately, the most important thing is to recognize assessment as a key piece of the program/service development cycle and dedicate time and effort to developing and implementing ways to assess your outreach programs and services.

G library, Midwest state

G library has ten library branches and serve 240,000 residents in p county, midwest state. They offer a variety of outreach programs, but the SPARK program (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) is one of their oldest, having operated for the past 16 years. The program started with a Kellogg Foundation grant that the local Sisters of Charity wrote for the program, and it was initially piloted in two sites. It's an early intervention, home visiting program for kindergarten readiness. A staff person (called a Parent Partner) goes to the home once or twice a month and works with the preschooler and the parent, guardian, or caregiver and leads them through a prepared lesson with a particular book. The child then gets to keep the book along with a small packet of paper, drawing materials, and something for activities such as play dough.

The Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) (run by the Sisters of Charity) oversees the SPARK program, and the participating school districts are considered partners as well. In addition, the program includes a Responsive Services Team—made up of a child psychologist, a speech therapist, a child behavior specialist, a school representative (principal, intervention specialist or a kindergarten or preschool teacher), and the SPARK supervisor—with whom the Parent Partners meet once a month. While the library is not the lead partner in the program, they play a major role by hiring, training, and managing the Parent Partners who do the home visits. The library also incorporates library services into the home visits and other aspects of the SPARK Program. Their approach is “for those people who aren't coming to the library, we are taking the library to them.”

The library and their partners are using a variety of assessment measures to understand all aspects of the program. As a part of the SPARK program, assessments are done with the children

when they enter the program to determine where they are academically. They have also done some follow-up assessments with the same children at different points in their academic progress and found that the SPARK children were outperforming the kids in their grade level who were not in SPARK, even in as high as fifth grade. In addition, the ECRC has administered a survey to participating families to find out how they felt the program went, what could improve it, and what needed to be changed. Along with these more formal methods, they also use some internal, more informal methods of assessments to constantly improve the program. The entire SPARK team will meet as a group occasionally to review how the program is going, so they can make adjustments, if need be. In addition, the Parent Partners gather anecdotal feedback from the families they interact with and continuously collaborate with the library staff to refine the program based on parent feedback and their own observations.

H Library, Mid-Atlantic state

H Library in Mid-Atlantic state has 6 branches and 3 mobile service vehicles, that serve a population of just over 160,000, and circulate 3.6 million items annually. The library's bookmobile needed costly repairs, so the library decided to invest in smaller vehicles of different sizes to transport their collections, pop-up program resources, and puppet show materials. This gave them the flexibility to visit new sites—4H fairs, farmer's markets, festivals—and provide increased access for people to board the bus and browse the collections more easily. The library partners with an organization called [name], which has locations around the area, to help reach families and children in underserved communities. The library has also created Make and Learn kits that feature books and STEM materials that can be used by both librarians and community educators outside the library. These endeavors have been funded through grants and community funding opportunities such as banks and so forth.

Like J library, H library had the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on how their outreach program was going and where they might want to make changes to better serve their communities. Part of this reflection process is how they go about assessing their programs. Ingrained in the culture of the staff is the inclination to ask, “what’s working well, what do we want to keep, what’s not working, and what can we do differently to be more effective?” This culture fosters a dynamic approach to outreach that is constantly shifting and adjusting for next time. So this is a self-assessment on the part of the staff about the successes and challenges of programs and services being offered out in the community. Additionally, H library conducts surveys with community members or parents to get their feedback on the program or service to learn more about their thoughts and reactions. That kind of data can help staff understand how to adjust or reuse pieces of a program according to how it was received. “Outreach in general is like community engagement. You can expand the presence of a library in the lives of people in the community. The library is a magnet to draw people to resources, activities, expertise—staff expertise—all around lifelong learning.”

Summary

Whether assessment happens formally, as in the type of reading assessments incorporated into G library SPARK program, or informally, as in H library's deliberate reflection process that each staff member undergoes after each program, assessment gives you a barometer to know how you're doing, what improvements could enhance the program, and what sorts of resources will be necessary to bring those improvements to fruition. Because the data from assessments clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of their program through the continued success of fifth graders who participated as preschoolers, SPARK was able to hire more Parent Partners. Hence, assessment can also help build justification for additional resources, staff positions, funding and more because when your assessments show that your programs are meeting their goals and improving life for community members, it increases your credibility and gives you a more powerful platform from which to advocate for your programs and ultimately for your library.

The Whole Picture:

The cases you've read about so far represent the various components of our outreach model. We also wanted to offer two case studies of libraries that illustrate the complete model in action, but in different ways. The J Library is a large library system in a big urban area that has taken some time to reflect on and reinvent their outreach strategy; thus their program is still quite new and in the midst of proving its relevance and sustainability. K Public Library is a small, rural library in Washington state that saw a critical community need—access to food over the summer—and developed a program to help. Think about how these libraries are engaging, cultivating, providing, and assessing in their outreach efforts to serve their communities and make a difference in the world around them. It doesn't matter what size you are, or the extent of your budget, or how many staff you have—there are pieces you can take from all these cases that can help you get your outreach plan off the ground.

J Library, Southern region

The J Library in southern region includes 25 branches, was founded by an act of Congress in 1896, and serves a population of just over half a million. Two years ago, J Library took advantage of building renovations to try restructuring their outreach efforts. They decided to take the time to try some different initiatives to try and serve their community better. They created a new department called [name] to experiment with changing their branch-level outreach to citywide outreach. But this department needed to prove itself and so the librarians did some basis statistics tracking at the events they attended so that they can report back with information on the reach of the department in the community.

Project Playtime, an organization that works with families experiencing homelessness, is one of their primary partners. Because Project Playtime has been serving these families for years, the library feels strongly that they should take the lead from the partner and not assume the library

knows what the community needs. The partner has already established deep connections. Instead, “We go in to our partner and say, ‘Okay, these are the things that we can offer you’” and share a menu of all the possibilities, thereby giving the community partner more ownership in the program development process. In the most recent iteration of the program, Project Playtime held a drop-off program at [name] General (the downtown homeless shelter for 500 families that recently closed since shelters are being built in each ward) four days a week for three hours per day that created a space for children to play—a luxury children experiencing homelessness don’t often have. Rather than offering traditional storytime, the librarians bring books and do baby laptime in the baby room and offer to read with any children who are interested—often choosing books based on whatever the children’s play are playing. “There’s usually between 20-30 kids in the room. And I’d say each time that I go, I end up engaging directly with at least ten children with a book for various amounts of time. Sometimes a kid will sit there and want to read four different books. Sometimes they’ll read half a book and then wander off and do something else.”

These readings often happen one-on-one, but when parents pick their children up, the librarians can also encourage the parents to establish their own positive reading practices. One of their main goals with being at Playtime is to develop relationships with these families and to get the families to see the library all over the city. With 26 branches, the library can serve them wherever they end up finding housing. And so, the library wants to build that bridge with each of those families and letting them see, “Oh, the library can be something that’s consistent in your lives as you’re going through this huge transition and change.” This partnership with Project Playtime works well because the library staff are not allowed to supervise children; instead, the partner handles all of the supervision, organizing volunteers, etc. Furthermore, the new structure of the [name] department has enabled these staff members to cover this program, which currently takes place in hotels, the temporary housing for the families in transition. Because their regular salaries pay for the librarians who do this outreach and because the books they take to the sites come from the library collection, no additional funding is needed for this program.

This has been such a successful partnership that last year, Project Playtime awarded J Library the honor of Partner of the Year. A community partner took the initiative to connect with the library, identifying a need and the space for a library to step in and match their resources and programs with the target population. This partnership isn’t without its challenges, though, especially when it comes to communication—notifying partners of closures, expectations, policies, etc. So the staff at J Library are clear about communicating what roles they can fulfill, what they can and cannot do.

J Library is conducting both formal and informal assessments of both their individual programs and the overall status of this new department. They do basic statistical tracking at each event, a monthly report, an internal report to administration as well as a report to other branch libraries to keep them informed of community partnerships that are developing near them. The library staff

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also do their own “on-the-fly” assessments to keep track of interactions and the growth of the children as they go, a sort of ongoing informal assessment. They also send surveys to Project Playtime periodically to find out how they feel the community’s needs are being met. These kinds of regular check ins and reflections are important because J Library needs the information to demonstrate their relevance and purpose to survive as a department. This kind of assessment is tied back to engagement and forward to sustainability.

K Library, Northwest state

K Library is part of the [] Library District in Northwest state, serving a population of 3,455 residents and circulating a little over 19,000 items. Their Stimulating Summers camp program for children ages 6 to 12 includes the Feed Your Brain program for children ages 0-18, who join the camp children for two mid-day hours daily. The library already had a Community Library program one night a week (Prime Time Family, a Humanities northwest state program) in one of the schools, and when the library saw a need for summer daycare and meals for children in their surrounding community, they looked to their existing long-term partnerships with the local schools for establishing a new program that would meet these needs. Obtaining a grant from the Inland Northwest Community Foundation (now the Innovia Foundation) for a three-year pilot project, they currently host camp in three of their surrounding communities. The camp runs 8AM to 5PM for six weeks in the summer, and because of the challenges of coordinating funding and resources for all three sites, the library formed a separate 501(c)(3) that handles all of the camp finances. Families are charged a small fee for camp, which focuses on literacy and STEM activities, physical activities, and field trips. Those who cannot pay can receive full or partial scholarships—funds that the library obtains from the Friends of the Library and the library’s foundation.

Because children from migrant families and those who live in the more rural areas participate less because of transportation challenges, the library plans to find ways to provide transportation, such as through school buses. Funded by School’s Out Northwest state that fights summer learning loss and summertime hunger, the Feed Your Brain program hires a teacher or student teacher to provide educational enrichment. To save on resources, the food is prepared in one school kitchen, and a driver delivers the meals to the other two sites; since the driver also manages quality control for the food preparation, she delivers additional supplies to sites as needed. Day camp counselors, who are high school or college students, implement the rest of the programming that the library staff have planned around themes; the librarians provide binders of theme-related curriculum to provide programming continuity for all sites. Camp takes place in the local schools, who distribute information about camp to their students and encourage families to participate. Parents can use the camp as child care, enrolling for all six weeks, or they can register for individual weeks. In addition to the main grantors for the program, the library has received support from the local electric company, the Lion’s Club, and even the senior center.

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The library has found it challenging to increase participation in the program without transportation for outlying areas even though many high-needs families live in the area who could benefit from the program. The cost may also discourage some, despite the availability of scholarships. The library has also found it challenging to hire counselors and teachers for the program since local agricultural jobs often bring much higher wages. Coordinating three sites has also been difficult but having one person oversee all three has helped. In assessing the effectiveness of the program, the library keeps statistics on program participation, surveys families whose children attend camp, and send the names of the children who participated in camp to their schools to see if those children have avoided summer slide during the months out of school. Feed Your Brain also requires a pre- and post-reading assessment, which the librarians also use to assess the effectiveness of their programming.

One of the most important aspects of this program is that it has raised the profile of the library in the surrounding community and helped the city see the library's relevance to the community (particularly the underserved) and has therefore helped them to gain more funding and support from the city. "Start small and build from there." Building programming with partners takes time, but you can look at the partners you already have as a natural place to start.

Summary

The model we propose doesn't necessarily have one beginning point and ending point. It is meant to be an iterative cycle through which you can enter at any of the four points depending on where your library is in their outreach efforts. You can see that these two longer profiles exemplify each individual component of our model in a holistic way, beginning where they felt was best.

For J Library, because they had an opportunity to take a step back from their previous outreach approach to reflect and reassess, they took advantage of that time to think about what they needed to do to better reach their community and meet their needs. They also thought about what their own department needed in terms of information to be able to demonstrate impact and promote sustainability. They chose to work with an existing partner to build on the foundation they had already built and see how they could put their reflection into practice. Their engagement and cultivation work led to a program that met the families and children where they are to cultivate a love of reading.

K Library started from engagement and recognized a need in their community for day care and meals. They then leveraged existing partnerships to save work and capitalize on their expertise. From there they built a camp that offered STEM and literacy activities as well as field trips and meals to, again, meet families and children with what they need and, as the title of the camp states, Feed their Brains. The library continues to work on meeting logistical challenges and developing meaningful assessment measures that help them demonstrate impact and purpose.

You can start from any point on the model that works for you and your library, based on resources and so forth, and then develop your outreach program from there. Refer back to these profiles from time to time for inspiration and problem-solving ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We asked our interviewees what advice they have for libraries who are looking to grow their outreach work. Here are their insights, arranged thematically; you'll see echoes of our model throughout their words of advice—engage, cultivate, provide, and assess:

ENGAGE:

One librarian discussed the importance of identifying where the needs in the community lie and figuring out how the library can use its strengths to meet those needs:

If a library is just starting something, I think the first thing is trying to get a sense of your community and what is needed. And then from there, figure out how to fulfill that need. So, it could be a vehicle to help, it could be popup programs where we don't really need a vehicle. As with everything, do a little pilot and build from there and constantly tweak it with what's working and how it can be done differently to be more effective. Always looking at the big picture for the community and the larger perspective of the library system and services.

Another librarian recommended looking at the resources closest to you for outreach ideas and locations:

Think about where you typically go to feel part of the community or do something in your community. And then consider how the library could be a part of that experience. What tools do you already have as a library system that you could bring to a library experience or an outreach experience at that location, whether it's a community event or whatever? Think about those tools and really curate what you're bringing so you showcase the unexpected side of the library.

CULTIVATE:

One librarian extols the importance of finding someone within the partner organization who will champion your involvement, and networking from there:

Try to connect with at least one organization in your community. Whether it is your local school district, health department, family council, or others, find a community organization and one person within that organization to connect with. In the case of the schools, find a teacher, secretary, or the principal to be that connection for you. They can be the person that opens the doors for you to get you in the classroom, at parent night, and more. And then, from there, when you get to parent night, or family night, you can connect with the other organizations that are there and start networking. Find and make

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use of every opportunity, because one connection, wherever it is, can spark multiple connections and community relationships.

The second librarian emphasizes the importance of open communication lines that run both ways:

One of the most important things is to over communicate with your partner. Most of the time, when I've felt like I'm pestering somebody, they actually thank me for the communication because they had been busy and it slipped off their radar. Everyone is busy, so you have to be willing to put yourself out there and make sure that you find a way to succinctly describe what you can offer. Instead of approaching it as, "Oh, you have access to kids and we need to read to kids," frame it in a way that will communicate that the library can support and supplement their organization's mission and provide benefits to who they are serving.

PROVIDE:

One librarian recommended the strategy of just jumping in and getting started with providing programs:

You have to just jump in and do it. You could plan all day but really you just need to look for the opportunities. Once you get partnerships in place with community groups and people, then start brainstorming or talking about what are they doing and where possibilities might lie. Once you have identified an opportunity, figure out what you can do to fulfill that opportunity. What does it look like? Do you have grant funding? What are the details? Then, decide how much you're going to put towards it and what your resources are and then just do it.

Another librarian acknowledged the importance of starting small and being patient with the process:

Start small with your programs. Take it one step at a time. Connect with a community organization—Boy Scouts, schools, any organization that is dealing with kids—and build a relationship. Then start where you can with your resources and develop a program you can manage with your partner. Once you have one successful program, then they're more excited to help you with the next program. So, lay the foundation and then grow your programs. Most importantly, recognize that the process takes time.

Finally, this librarian recommended having confidence in your ability to make your programs meaningful and impactful for your community:

You need to believe in what you are doing and have confidence in what you can offer. When you are starting out it can be hard to establish a new program as others may not understand what you are doing or see the value in it. People said to me, "You can't do STEAM story times for three-year-olds. STEAM is for fifth graders." You may hear

things like that when you are starting out so you need to have the confidence and passion to kind of push beyond that.

ASSESS:

One librarian identified the importance of involving the participants in your assessment strategy:

It's important to talk to the participants and get their feedback. Ask them, "What could you use? What could you do more of? What could we offer to you to help you even more?" That piece is really important. If we just kept doing what we were doing just because we thought it was great, I don't think our program would be as successful as it is.

Another librarian felt that it was crucial to collect stories as well as numbers when trying to determine value:

Once you have offered a program or service, you need to evaluate if it was worth your time. Is it worth continuing to invest time, energy, and effort? You can't just look at stats for that; you also really need to look at the stories from within the program to determine whether it's of value.

CONCLUSION

One thing we heard time and time again from our participants was how they wanted to do more to reach the parts of their community they knew were being underserved, to serve those who were encountering significant barriers to accessing the library. And yet, every library has its limits—financial, staffing, transportation, and more—and those limits can often overlap with the community's barriers. What we hope is that our study and the model we've developed will help you in every stage of your outreach program development—whether you're at the beginning stages looking for a roadmap to help you get the program off the ground, or whether you've been doing outreach work for a while and you're taking a moment to reflect, revise, and perhaps increase your offerings. Focus on engaging with your community, cultivating strong and lasting partnerships, providing responsive and interactive programs that seek to meet community needs, and assessing along the way to remain agile in your program development. You can build connections in your community while staying within your resources and making a difference where families and children are living their lives outside of the library. In this way, you will make a difference and help situate your library as an anchor in your community.

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