**The Library as Social Connector: Forging Community Connection**

**Learner Guide**

<https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/library-as-social-connector-webinar.html>

**Event Description**: Strong social cohesion is a crucial factor in a community’s resilience in times of stress and disruption. Unfortunately, studies show that our communities are experiencing a steady erosion of social cohesion, pointing to an increase in loneliness, depression, and separation because of too much time spent online and too little time spent in community. Libraries have the position and the power to rebuild social bonds, offering that sense of community and shared place that humans crave. Active learning programs that bring people together for participatory, shared experiences are a boost to community strength, but they could go even further to amplify social connection and build social infrastructure. Join us as we explore library programs through the lens of social possibilities and devise strategies to be more intentional about forging stronger community bonds.

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| **What are your goals for viewing this webinar?** |
| **Personal Goals** |  |
| **Team Goals** |  |
| **Applying the Social Connector Lens to Programming**  |
| Libraries have been making a dramatic shift from passive to active engagement with community members, particularly through programs that bring people together for participatory, shared experiences. List active learning or participatory programs you currently offer (or would like to offer) in your library. 1.
2.

 4. 5. |
| **The Art of Gathering at Libraries** |
| Betha and Jennifer were inspired by Priya Parker’s book, [The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1027769411), in exploring the importance of embracing the host role at library gatherings. Read the short Q&A with Priya Parker, published by Anythink, [Creating a world that you wish existed](https://www.anythinklibraries.org/spark/creating-world-you-wish-existed), to get a taste of her approach, or read her book!With a new “social connector” lens, consider how existing programs could benefit from more intentional design towards creating social cohesion. Select one of your existing programs from your list above, and consider the ways you could build intentionality in each of the steps below: **The event starts with the invitation*** What is your clear, specific purpose in gathering guests for this program?
* How might you rename your program to reflect this purpose?
* Who are your intended guests? Do you have age preferences? Will it be intergenerational?
* How will you market this event to reach your intended guests?
* Set expectations for your guests so they can be prepared. Is there something you could ask your guests to bring to the event? E.g. bring/send a photo of happy moments they had in past year.

Note: If the event involves program partners, be sure to orient them to your new program model and set expectations for them as cohosts of your gathering.**Crossing the threshold*** How might you welcome and usher guests to the environment and prepare them for new experiences?
* Look carefully at the space where you will gather.
	+ Will guests be able to find it easily?
	+ Is it welcoming to those who are new to the library environment?
	+ How could you ensure that people will feel comfortable in the space?

**Equalize and connect your guests*** What ideas do you have for helping guests to engage with each other on an equal footing?
	+ Suggestion from Priya Parker: Avoid introductions that emphasize titles or identities that relate to hierarchies or status; e.g. make a rule for guests to \*not\* talk about their work, degrees or titles.
* Considering the diverse backgrounds and orientations of your guests, what could you do to create an open, inclusive and safe space?
* How will you create connections, and find ways to mix the group up, so people are not staying in their usual clusters.?

**Closings matter*** What wrap-up activity could you do that allows guests to reflect on their experience?
* How can you provide a way for guests to share their feedback or stories of their experience with others outside of the library, i.e., with their networks?
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| **How will you tell this story to your stakeholders?** |
| Libraries have a long history of improving the social infrastructure of a community, but we don’t talk about it enough! Eric Klinenberg, in [Palaces for the People](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1050314900), encourages us to be prepared to advocate for the role libraries play in creating social infrastructure. After you have more intentionally applied the social connector lens to the program identified above, discuss or consider how you might communicate the experience and impact to your stakeholders. How does this fit into the big picture of advocating for the value of your library?  |
| **Reflect on this experience applying social connector intentionality to your program and REPEAT with a new selection from your list above!** |
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