**Libraries as Social Connectors: Strategies for Deepening Community Engagement**

**Resources and Action Guide**

This collection of resources and action steps can be used to reflect and take notes, and to identify steps to take action on deepening social connection for your community. Bring the guide home to your team and community, feel free to revise, and make it your own. This guide and our slides are available to download via our session page in Whova or on WebJunction ([guide-doc](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2023-09/guide-libraries-as-social-connectors.docx) and [slides-pdf](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2023-09/slides-libraries-as-social-connectors.pdf)).

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| **Why focus on social connection?** |
| Reading[Surgeon General’s Advisory on Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf) (pdf), May 2023* Press Release [New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States](https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html), May 2023
* Video overview: <https://youtu.be/B8pa506BFk4>
* [Factors That Can Shape Social Connection](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-graphic-factors.pdf) (pdf)

Take Action* Review the six foundational pillars of the framework for a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection (more details in Press Release or on p. 47 of Advisory) and identify places you see overlap with your library’s mission and vision.

**Six foundational pillars:**1. Strengthen Social Infrastructure
2. Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies
3. Mobilize the Health Sector
4. Reform Digital Environments
5. Deepen Our Knowledge
6. Cultivate a Culture of Connection
* Use the Surgeon General’s Advisory to bring discussion about the loneliness epidemic to your colleagues and community stakeholders.
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| **Why Libraries?** |
| Reading[Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/socially-connected-communities.html)In a WebJunction article, Noah Lenstra reflects on a report on [Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation](https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/socially-connected-communities-solutions-for-social-isolation/) published by [Healthy Places by Design](https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/) highlighting how libraries and other leaders can work together to address this issue.[Palaces for the People: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life](https://worldcat.org/en/title/1050314900), Eric Klinenberg, 2018Dalmer, Nicole K.; McKenzie, Pam; Rothbauer, Paulette; Martin-Yeboah, Ebenezer; and Oswald, Kevin, "Palaces for the People: Mapping Public Libraries' Capacity for Social Connection and Inclusion" (2022). FIMS Publications. 375. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/fimspub/375> [Project unlonely: healing our crisis of disconnection](https://worldcat.org/en/title/1360263303), by Jeremy Nobel. See also [Project Unlonely](https://www.artandhealing.org/unlonely-project/). Nobel unpacks our personal and national experience of loneliness to discover its roots and take steps to find comfort and connection.[What Organizations and Communities Can Do to Promote Social Connectedness](https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/partners.htm), CDC Take Action* How would you make the case with **your** stakeholders for **why libraries** make sense to help address social isolation?
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| **Relationship Audit for Social Connection** |
| * Note any promising programs and services others shared that address social connection that you want to be sure to remember.
* Reflect on the range of relationships your library has or wants to have with different stakeholders. Which groups may benefit from some intentional focus on social connection? Prioritize a group or two and keep them in mind.
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| **Adding Intentionality** |
| ReadingFrom Priya Parker:* [The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters](https://worldcat.org/en/title/1027769411)
* [Building Connections: The Gathering Toolkit](https://www.priyaparker.com/gathering-toolkit)
* [Learn the art of gathering](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/Topics/smart-spaces/learn-art-of-gathering.pdf) (pdf), a short summary of the art of hosting created by WebJunction

Take ActionA checklist for gatherings: Review this checklist for your intended gathering, to apply intentionality for deeper engagement.* What is your ‘why’?
* What is your desired outcome?
* Who should extend the invitation and in what form to reach the intended audience?
* Does the invitation match people to purpose?
* Do people know what to expect from the invitation?
* Does the invitation have emotional resonance?
* Have you designed for connection?
* Does your opening maximize the audience’s captured attention?
* Have you helped people feel comfortable and safe enough to participate?
* Have you provided some time for reflection at the end?
* Does your closing elevate what you want people to remember most?

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| **Prompts and Icebreakers** |
| Asking the right question can make all the difference! As you consider the groups or audiences you plan to host or gather, explore some of the [icebreakers shared](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2023-10/favorite-prompts-icebreakers.docx) (doc) and consider which ones would work best for the gathering. Remember to consider: Is this question inclusive of the experience of all who will gather? Is it age appropriate? Do you presume anything in your question? |
| **Strategies for Connection** |
| Reading[Program Model: Coffee & Conversation](https://programminglibrarian.org/programs/coffee-conversation) from Dallas Public Library on the *Programming Librarian*[World Café Method](https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/) and [Hosting Tool Kit](https://theworldcafe.com/tools-store/hosting-tool-kit/)Madison Public Library* [Tell Us!](https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/about/tell-us), a community-led planning process
* [Tell Us Packet](https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/sites/www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/files/media/Tell%20Us%20Packet%20-%20English_0.pdf) (pdf)

WebJunction Tools for Community Engagement and Needs Assessment* [Beyond the Survey – Basket of Discovery Tools](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/Topics/smart-spaces/basket-of-community-discovery-tools.pdf) (pdf) and webinar, [Getting to the Heart of the Community Through Discovery](https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/community-through-discovery.html), WebJunction

On Passive Engagement* [Passive Programming Builds Community](https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2020/02/passive-programming-builds-community/), ALSC Blog, February 2020
* [Passive Programs](https://library-nd.libguides.com/programming/passive), North Dakota State Library LibGuide
* [Passive Library Programs: ideas for self-directed activities in school and public libraries,](https://wakelet.com/wake/AnTLlPZOFccDCyzOYX3uO) Wakelet by Rebecca J. Morris
* [Adult Coloring Explosion](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/adult-coloring-explosion.html), for a wealth of ideas on coloring at libraries

Bridgebuilding Hub on WebJunction, with IREX* The [Bridgebuilding Resource Hub](https://oc.lc/bridge-building) offers a space to support libraries with bridging and other civic strengthening activities. Check out the Hub to explore the resources and read a collection of library case studies that offer examples, strategies, and lessons learned.

[Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC) Facilitation Skills for Small and Rural Libraries](https://www.ala.org/tools/librariestransform/libraries-transforming-communities/small-mid-rural-public), a free asynchronous six-part e-course and facilitation guide from the American Library AssociationTake ActionHow did the examples from different libraries spark ideas you’d like to capture here for further exploration?  |
| **Action Planning** |
| Revisit the “audience” you selected earlier – sketch out an engagement idea here, consider questions and roadblocks. Share with your neighbor. * Why are you gathering this group?
* What is your desired outcome?
* How will you intentionally structure the time / activities for social connection?
* What roadblocks do you anticipate?
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