

Creating a culture of trust and bridgebuilding

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**Building a Culture of
Trust and
Bridgebuilding at our
Library**

Intent

Understand the intent of your role in the library.

In previous jobs I've held, numbers were the measure of success. In libraries (with great directors) you get to shake off the shackles of numbers and decided a different measure of success.

Intent

Success for me looks like:
Did people connect today?
Did someone leave feeling more seen
than when they arrived?

The world is full of pressure: from work, family, relationships, and expectations. Being in a library and attending library programs can be one of the few places where there is no pressure to perform, participate, or produce. You can simply be and connect.

Belonging is the Foundation of Trust

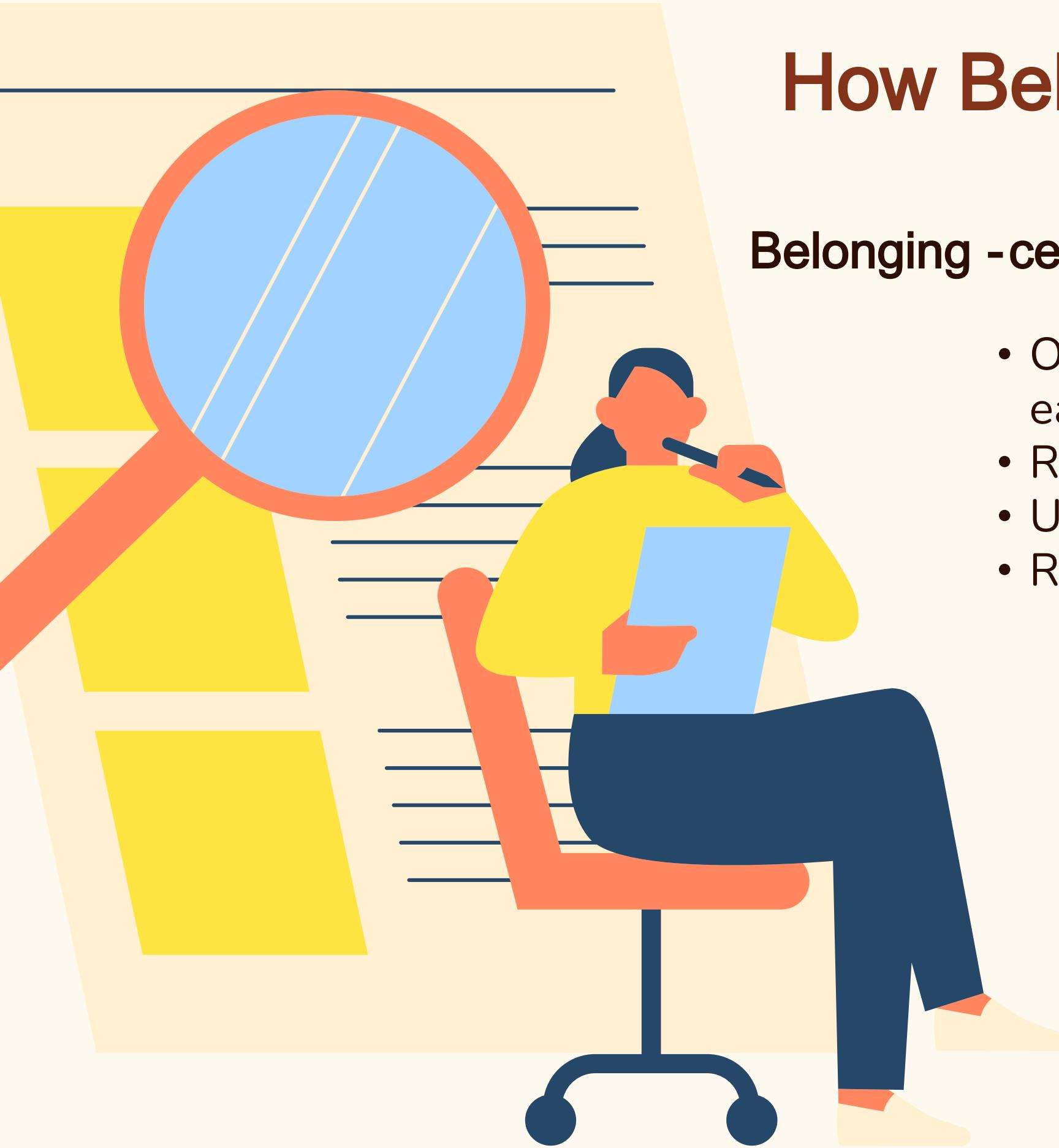
Patrons develop trust when their interactions with the library are:

- Consistent
- Respectful
- Predictable
- Free from unnecessary pressure or judgment

Belonging Builds Trust Because It:

- Signals that people are valued beyond transactions
- Reduces fear of embarrassment or exclusion
- Creates confidence that the library is a safe, reliable space

How Belonging Practices Build Patron Trust



Belonging -centered practices communicate trustworthiness by:

- Offering choice in how to engage (observe, participate, leave early)
- Removing barriers to access (cost, knowledge, registration)
- Using welcoming, non-authoritative language
- Responding to needs with curiosity instead of correction

How Belonging Practices Build Patron Trust

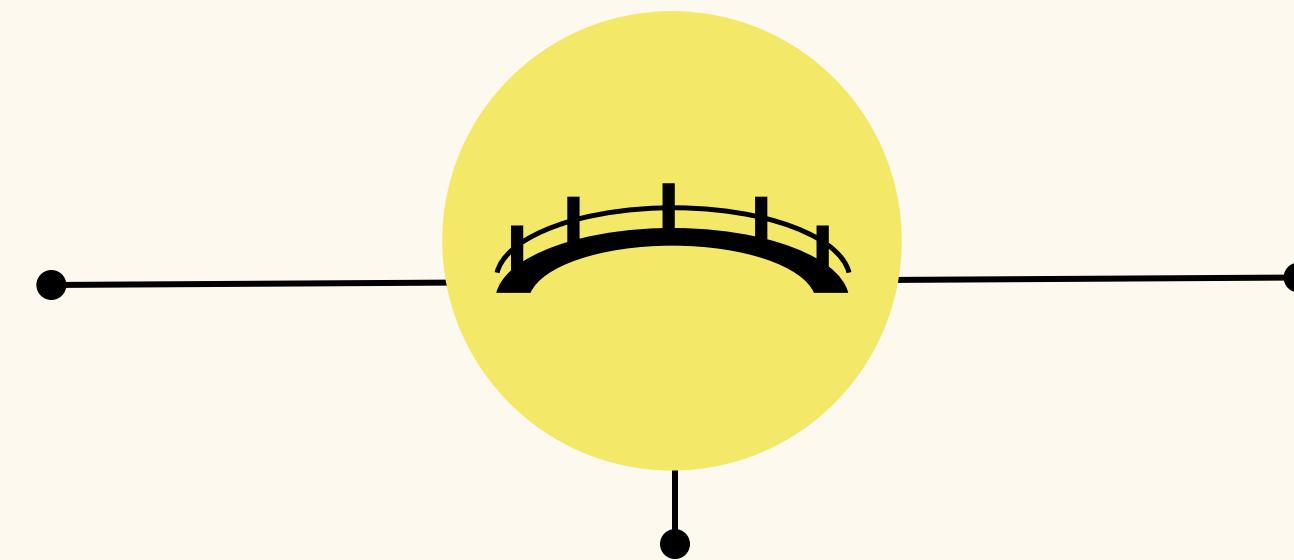
What Builds Over Time:

- Patrons feel comfortable returning
- Patrons ask for help without hesitation
- Patrons recommend the library to others
- Community members see the library as “for people like me”

Partnerships as Trust Bridges

We Partnered With:

- Nonprofits
- Local businesses
- Schools and local university
- Civic organizations



Purpose:

To meet people where they are and extend the library's values into trusted spaces.

Partnerships Were Built On

- Listening before planning
- Shared goals rather than library-driven agendas
- Flexibility around space, time, and format
- Mutual respect for expertise and lived experience



What Partnerships Made Possible

Belonging in Action

- Programs felt familiar and safe
- Participation was low-pressure
- Partners helped shape tone and approach
- Community members felt seen, not recruited

Outcomes of a Partnership -Centered Approach

- Increased participation from new and returning patrons
- Stronger community trust in the library
- Programs that reflected real community needs
- Efficient use of staff time and resources
- Sustainable, repeatable models for future programming



Bridgebuilding Resource Hub

Strengthening civic life and a sense of mutuality through libraries

The Library Bridgebuilding program is a project of [IREX](#), a global development and education organization, with support from [More Perfect](#), [Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors](#), and the [Walmart Foundation](#). The project was created to enhance bridgebuilding capabilities of public libraries to combat rising levels of distrust and division in the United States.



IREX defines bridgebuilding (also called bridging) as engaging across difference in ways that respect identities, foster mutual relationships, seek a common good, and promote a commitment to civic engagement, thereby contributing to increased [social capital](#) and strengthened [civic infrastructure](#), and ultimately, a stronger democracy. This hub is a space to share resources to support libraries with bridging and other civic strengthening activities.

Thank you!

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