Building Community Connections

From Discovery to Equity

Libraries aspire to connect with all members of their communities. But simply promoting library services and programs to new communities doesn’t necessarily have the desired result of actual engagement. Families need to feel centered in the library’s offerings and welcomed to the library space. Meaningful discovery is about really listening to and learning from the communities in your library’s service area. Getting to equity starts with forming relationships.

Definitions

♦ **Equity** - Individualized strategies designed to address historical barriers to access
♦ **Inclusion** - Bringing traditionally under-represented individuals and communities into processes and activities (sharing power)
♦ **Diversity** - The ways in which people differ; also includes different ideas, perspectives and values

*ACTIVITY*

**What can I influence?** As an exercise, take a look at your calendar.

♦ How did you spend your time this week?
♦ Where did you go?
♦ Who did you meet with? Did you engage a new audience or community?

♦ Think about how you might adjust your work week schedule to include more time for learning about and connecting with new audiences.

“Equity gaps are not deficits, they are opportunities to expand your library’s reach and build collaborative relationships.”
Pathway to Equitable Programming

This pathway is intended to help you build your capacity to create equitable programming with your community. Keep in mind that the end of the path cycles back to the beginning and the steps between overlap and repeat.

Identify Local Priorities

Decide

Highlight your community assets. In conversation with internal and external stakeholders, identify 1-2 priorities.

Gather Information

Learn

Increase your understanding of your community by gathering information including demographic data and community led data.

Build Relationships

Listen

Create connections with community members. Be alert to partnership possibilities and changes affecting service needs.
Plan Services

**Design**
Develop a plan of service to **address local priorities**, including how the service will be delivered and evaluated.

**Deliver Services**

**Implement**
If possible, collaborate with a **partner** who is already serving the audience you hope to reach.

**Evaluate Services**

**Reflect**
Evaluate the program. Were your outcomes met? What did you learn? What happened that you did not anticipate?

*Photo: Seattle Public Library*