

Creating Social Change Through Library Programming

If your aim is to create social change through your activities, programs, and events, it's essential to think strategically and consider the desired outcomes you would like to achieve. The following are some simple methods to help you shape your approach to creating social change.

Phase 1: Preparing for change

Define the desired change: Before you can *create* change you have to *know* what specific change or outcomes you would like to achieve through your programs or event. For example, it could be fostering increased understanding, empathy, or connections among diverse community members. Clearly articulating this change helps you to plan more intentionally.

Identify target groups: Determine the specific groups or communities you want to engage and impact through your programs. Consider their needs and interests, as well as potential barriers to participation.

Conduct a needs assessment: A simple needs assessment can help you to gather information about the current state of social cohesion and existing divisions within the community as well as identify the challenges, concerns, and aspirations of different groups. This can be done through simple surveys, interviews, focus groups, or community conversations. An example of an easy needs assessment can be found here: [Simple needs assessment.docx](#)

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU PREPARE

- What are the specific needs, challenges, or divisions within the community that the library aims to address?
- How can the library identify and understand the underlying causes of these issues?
- What perspectives and voices should be included in the assessment process?

TIP: Combining methods— e.g., a community survey and informal conversations—can help you to gain a better understanding of social cohesion within your communities and help you to tailor programs accordingly to promote inclusivity and bridge divisions. But if using more than one method is beyond your capacity, don't worry! Employing one form of data gathering is better than relying on assumptions or limited observations.

Phase 2: Designing and planning your program or event

Identify the purpose and set SMART goals: Start by clearly defining the purpose of the program or event. By starting with a clear vision, you will begin to envision the change you want to see in your community or target audience, for instance, fostering civic engagement or addressing specific social issues. Having a clear vision will guide your planning and decision-making process. Establish specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that align with the desired change. SMART goals provide a clear direction and serve as

benchmarks for success. For example, a goal could be to increase the number of library users accessing resources related to diversity by 20% within six months.

TIP: Identify one or two specific areas where you want to create change through your programs or events. By focusing your efforts on a few key areas, you can allocate your limited resources more effectively.

Incorporate evaluation from the start: Evaluation doesn't have to be overly complicated or hard! More than likely, you are already doing some form of data collection—observing participants at an event, speaking with participants/patrons, reflecting on these experiences, or simply counting the number of people in attendance. You should always aim to build evaluation components into the program/event design process from the beginning. One of the first steps in incorporating evaluation is to determine what data and information will be valuable to assess the impact and effectiveness of the activities. This will help you to measure change and make informed decisions for future programming.

Collaborate with stakeholders and use participatory approaches: Foster active participation and involvement of community members in the design and implementation of programs or events. Seek their input, feedback, and ideas to ensure that the activities are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to their needs. If possible, you should attempt to engage local organizations, schools, and other stakeholders in the planning process.

TIP: Collaborative partnerships can amplify the impact of programs and events by leveraging collective resources, expertise, and networks. By pooling resources and expertise, you can achieve more significant outcomes without placing a heavy burden on your individual library's capacity.

Design inclusive and interactive programs: Create programs that promote interaction, dialogue, and collaboration among diverse participants. Incorporate activities such as facilitated discussions, cultural exchanges, storytelling, or arts-based projects that encourage empathy, understanding, and connection.

Phase 3: Implementation and delivery

Clearly communicate the purpose and expected outcomes of your program to participants and stakeholders.

Provide opportunities for shared experiences: Organize events or activities that bring people together in shared experiences. Create a safe and inclusive environment that encourages open dialogue, respect for diverse perspectives, and active engagement. This could include community celebrations, exhibitions, book clubs, or workshops where individuals can engage in meaningful conversations and build relationships.

TIP: Remember, not all participants/patrons have the same interests. Try to offer a variety of program formats and activities to cater to different interests and learning styles.

During phases 1-3: Monitoring and evaluation

Define specific measures or indicators that will help you gauge progress towards the desired change. Some examples of indicators can be found here: List of Indicators to Measure Change.docx

Starting with the needs assessment, **collect data** throughout the program to better understand participants' engagement, satisfaction, and learning. Use simple and practical methods for data collection, such as observation or brief surveys, or invite participants to share personal stories or testimonials about how the library's programs or events have impacted on their lives.

Regularly communicate and share updates with stakeholders to maintain transparency and foster ongoing support.

Don't have time or capacity for traditional data collection? You can employ some of the methods found here: Data Collection for Librarians.docx

QUESTIONS TO HELP DEFINE DATA COLLECTION:

- What data will I need to collect to determine the effectiveness of the program or event?
- Does this data align with the goals I established?
- What data collection method will I use (e.g. surveys, observation, testimonials/storytelling)?

TIP: Utilize existing data sources: Leverage existing data sources to gather information that aligns with your desired change. For example, you can use library circulation data, attendance records, or community surveys to gain insights into the impact of specific programs or events.

Phase 4: Reflection and learning

Reflect: Regularly reflect on the impact of your event or programs by engaging in self-reflection and peer discussions to identify changes you have observed or experienced, which can be documented through informal feedback, participant testimonials, and conversations.

Engage in continuous learning: Embrace a culture of continuous learning and improvement by regularly reviewing data, adjusting strategies as needed, and applying lessons learned to enhance future programs or events. Consider conducting periodic evaluations to assess the long-term impact of your initiatives on social cohesion and bridging efforts, measuring and reflecting on progress related to the goals you identified at the outset.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU REFLECT:

- How are we incorporating what we have learned from the community in our programming?
- Are the programs/events that we are creating based on what we have learned?

Facilitate discussions or reflection sessions to explore the impact of the program on individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions and create opportunities for participants to provide feedback on the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

TIP: Remember that the change process is an ongoing and iterative journey. We encourage you to be open to feedback, adapt your programs based on community needs, and continuously learn from their experiences. Collaboration, community engagement, and a commitment to inclusion are key principles to guide the change process in fostering social cohesion and bridging within library programming.
