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External Strategies: Relationships, Collaboration, Credibility: Lessons from Hartford Public Library

SI 643-Week 11

Librarians Devise a Variety of External Strategies to Carry Out Their Work

- Website Presence and Digital Reference
- Distance Learning
- Assisting remote users
- Marketing Strategies
- Raising awareness about/increasing the visibility librarians as information professionals; libraries as vital societal institutions.
- Linking and referral; information and referral.
- Making connections/collaboration;
- Developing strategic partnerships.

Collaboration in Professional Practice: A key external strategy

- Traditionally someone-else did external--e.g., marketing or “outreach”
- More recently external strategies are employed widely by people in different positions libraries/ information centers;
- Collaboration occurs with varying partners; it may involve role changes for the information professional;
- Collaboration brings gains to the community as well as to the collaborator;

First: Hartford Public Library's Community-Focused Initiatives

- Durrance, J.C., Souden, M., Walker, D. & Fisher, K.E. (2006). "Community problem-solving framed as a distributed information use environment: bridging research and practice " *Information Research*, 11(4) paper 262 [Available at <http://InformationR.net/ir/11-4/paper262.html>]
- Durrance, J. C., Walker, D., Souden, M., & Fisher, K. (2006). The Role of Community-Based, Problem-Centered Information Intermediaries in Local Problem Solving. In A. Grove (Ed.), *2006 Proceedings of the 69th Annual Meeting: Information Realities: Shaping the Digital Future for All* (Vol. 43): Information Today.

Introduction

- Most communities face problems that impact the quality of life
- Libraries, as info centers, should be key sources of relevant community problem solving information.
- Despite decades of community-focused IB research-librarians still unable to anticipate info needs/use
- To remedy: US IMLS decided to fund proposals that help libraries anticipate information needs.
- This IBEC study funded by IMLS 2002-2005
- This research on community problem solving is 1 of 8 IBEC studies.

Why Hartford?

- Hartford faces serious problems associated with urban decay
 - Second-largest city in wealthiest state in the U.S; yet the poorest city in state.
 - Median income one-sixth that of Connecticut's most affluent municipality.
- Cadre of community groups who seek to solve problems
- A public library recognized nationally for its community focused work, desire to respond to community needs, & history of partnering.

The Library's Philosophy

*“Today's challenge is to reinvent the library to respond to community needs and aspirations, and yet to retain the core values of intellectual freedom, free and equitable access, and trust and mutual respect. The social change we are experiencing is as powerful as the technological change, and equally a driving force in the need to reinvent ourselves. How do we do that? By getting as close to the community as we can, paying attention to what they say, and participating in community organizations: **listening, learning, linking**”*

Louise Blalock, director
Hartford Public Library

Screenshot of the
2005 HPL home
page removed.

[http://web.archive.org/web/2005-re_
http://www.hplct.org/](http://web.archive.org/web/2005-re_/http://www.hplct.org/)

HartfordInfo

- Hartford Public Library's umbrella community information activities
- <http://www.hplct.org/>

Methodology

- Qualitative study
- Methods: interviews, focus groups, observations; document analysis
- Two data collection rounds
 - Round 1: identified and determined the information behavior of community groups themselves
 - Round 2: focused specifically on explicating the library's approaches to interacting with the community and anticipating and responding to its needs.
- Data coded thematically; themes emerged from the data.

The IUE Framework (REMEMBER?)

- The IUE is contextual (people, problems, settings, problem resolution)--and externally focused.
- Taylor (1991): The IUE as “a bridge between
a) users and their environments and
b) . . . librarians.”
- Choo (2006): “people’s perceptions . . . control the *breadth and depth* of their information search--including the time and effort to spend on searching, where to search, how information encountered is to be filtered, and how much and what kinds of information are required.”

Hartford's Community Problem-Solving IUE (1)

- The **people**--citizens--acting through community groups--including groups that meet regularly in city's 17 neighborhoods
- The **problems**--include blighted buildings, appearance of neighborhood streets, graffiti, traffic calming; problems are often interrelated--thus groups often **coalesce** around problems

Hartford's Community Problem-Solving IUE (2)

- **The neighborhoods**, within the framework of the city, **comprise the setting**; it is shaped by activities of loosely connected groups throughout Hartford.
- **Problem resolutions** result from the way the group(s) view a problem as well as what they see as possible solutions

Htford “Group” Characteristics

- Groups tend to focus on the *problem* rather than on information.
- Groups take different approaches to problem solving:
 - Some look for explicit resolutions
 - Others take a more comprehensive approach to a problem;
- Problem-solving groups often work in *partnership* with other community stakeholders.
- Groups prefer solutions that have worked in the past.

Information Behavior in the IUE

- A group's information needs, seeking & use are shaped in part by their approach to the problem
- Organizing groups may tailor, distill & contextualize information to meet the needs of citizens & stakeholders.
- Regularly scheduled community meetings (often held in the library's meeting room) enable:
 - Information sharing
 - Problem resolution discussions
 - Possible problem reframing
 - An innovative public library to more effectively anticipate & respond to community needs

Findings from the Library

While HPL staff don't use the term IUE, HPL's practice model:

- Has devised *partnering* mechanisms, including the Neighborhood Team concept & HartfordInfo, that enable staff to engage with community orgs who seek to solve problems;
- Seems to understand the dimensions of the “Community Problem Solving IUE”
 - people, problems, setting, problem resolution

Hartford's Neighborhoods

- http://www.hartfordinfo.org/community_data.asp

Findings re: HPL Neighborhood Teams (NTs)

- NTs represent HPL at 600 community meetings/year
- NTs represent HPL as community stakeholder
- NTs are *active participants* in the problem solving process
 - **Information provision by-product of participation**
- Embody NT slogan: “Listen, Learn, Link”



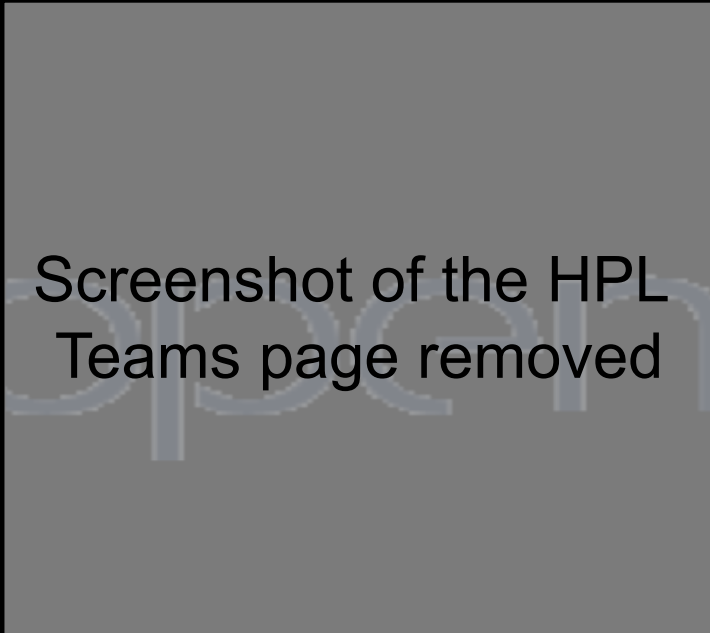
Asylum Hill/West End Team

Factors Associated with HPL Active Participation

- Librarians are 'at the table'
- Librarians able to anticipate needs & provide relevant information at the time of need/use
- Staff able to clarify information needs
- Providing timely relevant information sometimes helped to reframe the problem
- Being 'at the table' results in collaborative actions involving HPL
- Being a part of the problem-solving "IUE" has
 - helped HPL overcome the limitations of present practice
 - changed perceptions of HPL among members of community orgs who seek to solve problems


“[Her approach is to be] at the table. Not sitting in the back row, not standing by the door, but a participant. Even when there's nothing there for the library- so that you are perceived as, and in fact you are, a member of the group. She then looks for opportunities for the library to connect and make contributions. Rather than just hanging around and 'let me know if you need me' kind of thing.

-- HPL Manager



Screenshot of the HPL
Teams page removed

[http://www.hplct.org/NeighborhoodTeams/
neighborhoodteams.shtml](http://www.hplct.org/NeighborhoodTeams/neighborhoodteams.shtml)



Model for Anticipating
Community Needs
removed

Part of a poster created by:
Maria Souden, Dana Walker,
Joan C. Durrance, Karen E.
Fisher

Poster can be found here:
[http://www-personal.umich.edu/
~walkerdm/papers/
ALISE_poster_final.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~walkerdm/papers/ALISE_poster_final.pdf)