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Looking Again at Info Sought By Groups; Non-Profits & Neighborhood Groups in Hartford
Hartford PL Model of Engagement

SI 645

WK 7 Nov 2, 2009

Back To: AforA Table 6-2 Types of Information Needed by Citizen Groups

- Background knowledge/information

- Problem-solving information

- Knowledge of current conditions, government programs, legislation, proposals by bsns, etc

- Data for decision making including projections

- Comparative/evaluative data/information

- Political information based on experience of other groups/individuals—e.g., political savvy

Background Knowledge/Info

- Info about how government (incl legislature) works
- Knowledge of gov't procedures in area of concern
- How to find info such as title search, property information (ownership, taxes), maps, demographics of neighborhood.
- Which agencies to contact
- Where to find statistics
- Mechanisms to force disclosure
- Jargon associated with the issue/problem

Problem Solving Data

- ID the "real" problem/issue
- Understand the problem parameters, facets,
- Knowledge of complex issues (disinvestment)
- Conditions in neighborhood; community
- Knowledge of target group needs
- Legal implications of proposals/programs
- Costs/benefits of program

Current Conditions Assoc w Problem

- How to find/locate people, agencies (directory info)
- Legislative calendar information
- Contents of bills, laws
- Contents of government regulations
- Business changes that would affect the community
- Current statistical data (crime statistics, etc)

Projections—The Future—Data for Decision Making

- Government projections
- Environmental impact statements
- Long range plans by agencies or the organizations
- Possible effects of projections
- Costs/financial information re projected programs & their impact on area

Comparative-Evaluative Information

- General
- Examples from other cities/locations
- Precedents
- Alternative information to information provided by expert, government, corporation, etc.

Political Information (Savvy)
Based on Accumulated Knowl/Experience

- Political info; what is possible
- The political process
- Political know-how (how to get around red tape; how to accomplish group's goal; using the political environment)
- Evaluative; which sources are reliable
- Whom to contact
- How to get the information actually needed;

Sources of Local Information

- http://www.ewashtenaw.org/
- http://www.a2gov.org/Pages/default.aspx
- Townships: http://www.twp.webster.mi.us/
- State: http://www.michigan.gov/
- Federal: http://www.usa.gov/
- http://www.lib.umich.edu/government-documents-center/explore/
- Etc.

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 to Hartford Study

- 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** unable to anticipate info needs/use
- To remedy: US IMLS decided to fund proposals that help libraries anticipate information needs.
- IBEC funded by IMLS 2002-2005
- This research on community problem solving 1 of 8 IBEC studies.

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.

- 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 is 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.

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 (now retired)

Hartford Public Library

Study Background

Funding

- One of eight field studies conducted as part of IMLS grant between 2002-2005. This study was practice-based.

Focus of IMLS grant

- Develop approaches for librarians to use in anticipating the information behavior of people in community settings

Goal of this particular study

- Determine how information professionals can better anticipate the needs of local citizen groups and non-profit organizations

Challenge for researchers: gaining entry

Methodology

Qualitative methods

- Interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis

Data collection—two foci

- Examination of library's approaches to interacting with the community and anticipating and responding to its needs

- Examination of problem solving activities & information behavior of Hartford's local civic organizations
  - Organizations active in community problem-solving
  - Identified by library staff PLUS snowball sampling

Community Groups in Study

Neighborhood organizations (PSCs & NRZs)

- Problem-solving & neighborhood revitalization zone groups (17 officially designated neighborhoods)
- http://www.hartfordinfo.org/ (a service of HPL)
- Primarily citizens, business owners
- Issues related to quality of life, economic development

Problem or issue-based organizations

- Focused a particular issue rather than a geographically defined neighborhood

Meta-organizing groups

- Organize other groups
- Convene groups and community activists
- Disseminate community information and liaison with community agencies

What we found
In Round 1

PROBLEMS Faced by Hartford Groups

- **Similar to Problems** faced by Jane Jacobs and her neighbors and by groups in Toledo

- **Problems in response to actions or proposed actions** (or lack of action) by governmental agencies, by business or industry, and/or conditions within the community.

Htford: an Information Use Environment

- The IUE concept is a contextual (people, problems, settings, problem resolution) framework for service development

- 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

- **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

Characteristics of Htfd Groups

- 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 of Comm Grps

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

Problem-centered information intermediaries

- Organizations have *constructed* an important information role

- **Primary function** and mission emanates from problem focus—engage citizens; solve or reduce the problem

- **Secondary function** is to provide and facilitate the use of relevant information

Collecting & sharing information

- Formally and informally collect and share information
  - within their own groups
  - across network of community organizations
- Groups seek information from others

"One of the things I have found in Hartford is that people are very likely to call someone else to get information…"

"You call an information guru, someone you know personally. Information gathering is based on personal relationships."

Distilling, tailoring, interpreting

- Tailoring to constituents' needs
- Distilling
- Interpreting
- Vetting

*"People we deal with are not especially literate…
And it [information] has to come in a way that's
translated into a usable system or format."*

*"We have to take very complicated issues like healthcare and
translate it into ways people can understand. Not
more info or data, but a way people can understand it.
It's very challenging…"*

*"You can't show people charts and diagrams. It's not usable.
You don't want to, in a meeting, overwhelm people with
something that will make them feel stupid and not want to
come back."*

Preparing for use and disseminating

- **Prepare information for targeted use**
  - ➢ e.g., meeting preparation packets including community reports and background information on discussion topics; handbook on how to do property research
- **Disseminate information**
  - ➢ meetings, workshops and seminars
  - ➢ mail out relevant, timely information on a regular basis

"We give NRZs information. We look for information that would affect NRZs. We have liaisons and partnerships with different organizations in the city- tourism bureau, Christmas in April committee, and [we serve as] liaisons to those other groups.

We have monthly meetings to report on programs, projects of interest, and things happening."

What we found
In Round 2

- HPL's Neighborhood Teams professional practice focuses on Hartford's community orgs, the community's problems and problem resolution

- HPL has devised mechanisms, including the Neighborhood Team concept & http://www.hartfordinfo.org/

- that enable staff to engage with community organizations

Findings re: HPL Neighborhood Teams (NTs)

- NTs represent HPL at 600 community meetings/year

- NTs represent HPL as community stakeholder

- NTs are **active participant**s in the problem solving process
  - Information provision byproduct of participation

- The NT slogan is: "Listen, Learn, Link"

Factors Associated with HPL Active Participation

- Librarians are 'at the table' by attending meetings and actively participating in them
- Librarians able to anticipate needs & provide relevant information **at the time of need/use**
- Staff able to **clarify information needs in real time**
- Providing timely relevant information sometimes contributes to **reframing the problem**
- Being 'at the table' results in collaborative actions involving HPL
- The Hartford Model of anticipating community information needs has
  - helped HPL overcome the limitations of present practice
  - changed the perceptions of HPL among members of the community

"[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

How Does Hartford Public Library Get to "The Table"?

- HPL Staff in Neighborhood Teams:
  - Attend-participate in meetings
  - **Follow-up** (with info/support) based on what is heard
  - **Initiate** meetings
  - Engage in a variety of **active personal networking activities**
  - Develop a variety of collaborative relationships and partnerships
  - Make **presentations and conduct workshops** as needed
  - Actively use politically savvy approaches
- Hartford Public Library is woven into the natural fabric of various neighborhoods & the community

How Does Hartford Public Library Support "Community Engagement"?

- Leaders & staff consciously focus on HPL's community-centered ethic/role (including Neighborhood Teams and the "listen, learn, link" approach)
- Community-focused meetings attendance part of job description
- HPL hires staff who embrace the role
- The library fosters partnerships/collaborative activities
- Librarians design and brand specific community-focused services
- Creation of an internal structure that supports the activities that result in "at the table-ness" (meetings, training, etc)
- Active marketing
- Engage in a variety of activities designed to overcome barriers to role success including grant-writing to overcome financial/resource barriers