

Chapter 12

Library and Community Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Libraries, an organized collection of books and non-book materials, are always situated in communities to ensure that the inhabitants' information needs are promptly and adequately met. However, the level of library involvement in these communities is quite low or nonexistent in other places. It is therefore necessary for libraries to begin reaching out to these communities through creative and innovative programs that will involve the participation of community members and create awareness as they impress themselves and their worth on the community.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries influence or engage communities in their services, collaborating with volunteers from other professions to bring about the realization of the United Nations' vision 2030 Sustainable Development Goals which are blue print to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Community engagement in library services is instrumental to the progressive achievement of these goals. Therefore, involving in community engagement and necessary steps to take can help serve as a means to teach the community exchange relationship between them and the libraries so that the mutual benefits such as improved services, socio-cultural and political advantages can be enjoyed. The essence of community engagement is for library to improve the living condition of the community through effective collaboration not only with the community but other professionals.

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For the library to meet the community needs, the professionals (librarians) are to be stirred on how best to engage the community to increase and sustain services that are germane to their needs hence, serve as eye opener to the library (physical or digital) on ways communities can gather, interact, explore and exchange ideas.

Community engagement is an approach where public service bodies permit citizens to consider and express their views on how their particular needs are best met. This is done by encouraging the community people to have a say on their information needs and how this can be met. It can also be seen as working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographical proximity, common interest or similar situations to achieve a set goal or as the active involvement of group of people living in a geographical location of a library involved in library collaborative services that will benefit the community. This engagement gives the community opportunity to voice out their information needs that can only be met by libraries. It also helps the library to seek out the community's value, aspirations and needs and then incorporate this into services for sustainable involvement and development. (Sung and Hepworth, 2013).

Physical Community is the people living in the same geographical location with similar characteristics who inhabit the surrounding areas where the library is located. These people share culture, attitudes, beliefs, interest and religion in common. Another type of community is the virtual community which is not totally different from the aforementioned but share topics of common interest through discussion because they are people united by common goal(s).

Library on the other hand is a means to access information, ideas and works of resourcefulness that meet the needs of the community. It is the key to understanding one's place in the world, i.e. information on securing a safe water supply, health issues etc. It is also seen as a place of wide-eyed discovery, tool for life-long learning, support for political, cultural and social enquiry, bank of ideas and inspiration, source of answers to factual questions, place to acquire new skills, community center, local studies resource and a place of sheer pleasure and enjoyment. Library is the key and tool for educational development and sustainability because it is a means of access to information, ideas and works of imagination.

However, meeting these needs in this era of Information Communication and Technology and in different communities poses problems to the professional librarians. The era where all kinds of information is available freely and people are vulnerable to using information that does not add values to them; this is where library comes in to acquire different information resources, packaging it before making it accessible to them hence improve and enhance community skills.

The relationship between libraries and community cannot be over emphasized. Librarianship deals with identifying specific user needs, providing services to meet these needs, and persuading users of the need to act; thereby fulfilling the primary role of different types of library (school, academic, special and public). Engaging the community is not restricted to public libraries alone; therefore, the proactive measures and initiatives that different libraries can engage community with shall be dealt with.

For libraries to have impact on the society in this present age, they must move out of traditional practices and the comfort zones of their institutions and engage local communities that surround them. For instance, school library could organize inter schools debate, skill writing etc. this will improve the reading culture that is almost lost to phones and thinking that has been replaced by ping-pong.

In this digital age, it should be known that libraries are not just books and technology but builders of communities. Their services should be seen in perspective of community and culture. Though Information Technology is on the increase but it cannot build any community on its own hence Libraries use this technology to educate individuals and foster thoughtfulness in communities.

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