Chapter 6
Community Engagement Through Extension and Outreach Activities:
Scope of a College Library

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ABSTRACT

Extension and outreach services of libraries, archives, and museums (LAM) are to be essentially considered as an important aspect of social and ethical responsibility of an institution towards the society. An academic library, especially a college library, has immense scope for engagement of the community constituting the stakeholders of the institution for participation, involvement, skill development, and enrichment as well as the individuals outside the institution, ultimately towards inclusion, empathy, and compassion for the society at large. Exemplary evidences of the opportunities and accomplishments of a college library with special reference to the extension and outreach activities of Sir Gurudas Mahavidyalaya, Kolkata, West Bengal, India are provided. Innovation, collaboration, communication, creativity, and effective employment of ICT tools are the keys to successful execution.

INTRODUCTION

A library, archive, or a museum (LAM), has a social responsibility to engage the community. A community-LAM relationship is vital in the progress of society at large. The library, museum, or archive (LAM) and the community are interdependent entities. The understanding is essential that the community within the institution or organization extends its hands towards the community where the institution ensures its existence and vice versa.

The requirement of a community varies according to the demography. The needs of the people of India may differ as compared to any other country. Understanding the requirements of the community should

be given priority before planning long-term and short-term programs. Therefore to provide support, customized for the different categories and composition of the community, understand its requirements.

For successful execution, actualization, and implementation of the programs, the institutions need to visualize the outcomes.

College libraries, university libraries, and public libraries differ in their objectives.

A public library has its accountability for all kinds of users and the community. Academic libraries have limitations in the accessibility of their resources and services for the people. However, the community needs these institutions for diverse social requirements. Despite its accessibility restrictions for its resources, a college library can engage the community through various avenues.

Since libraries are at the heart of every academic institution, immense scope help involve, engage and cater to the community. A college library has innumerable possibilities for effective community engagement through extension and outreach programs.

There are innumerable ways to actively involve the students of the academic institutions, especially for a college. The active engagement of the students increases the student's critical thinking, problem-solving, and design thinking capabilities while addressing diverse issues. They develop social skills, communication skills, team spirit, and attitudes to help each other. They also acquire and share knowledge. They gradually transform into socially responsible citizens. Outreach programs can also sometimes be called extension services. Planning and execution of extension and outreach activities require a coordinated effort of the institution. Planning of extension and outreach activities also requires effective collaboration with other institutions and people.

To sum up, with the essential requirements of community engagement activities, it can be assumed that,

- Every program or activity must have a set of objectives and a strong message towards the community.
- The extension and outreach activities have a potentially positive impact on the community at large.
- "Higher education institutions" should support each other for the execution of extension programs and activities.
- Avoid repetitive and monotonous execution of activities.
- Planning and implementation should actively involve the stakeholders.
- The extension activities having collaborations with other social institutions and agencies ensures better execution of the activities.
- Implementing the activities must ensure maximum possible engagement, involvement, and interaction of the community.
- The librarian, faculty, and students may need to learn newer skills and techniques.
- The librarian, faculty, and the college authority must encourage activities that can enrich the student community.
- An institution must work to improve the scope of reaching out to individuals for the benefit of society.
- A constant reciprocation of community has to be the desired goal of an institution.
- Communication, innovation, and creativity are the parameters for successful community engagement.
- Creative ideas and thinking are required for problem-solving, ensuring community participation, ensuring community involvement, ensuring community development, social networking, and ensuring community as social capital.

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