

# *Community-Led Libraries Toolkit*



**Working  
Together**

STARTING US ALL DOWN THE PATH TOWARD DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

## Tool 7

### COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

- Definition
- Rationale
- Application
  1. Establish Relationship in the Community
  2. Gauge Interest
  3. Assess Needs with the Community
  4. Critique Your Collection
  5. Select and Acquire Materials
  6. Evaluate Continuously
  7. Celebrate
  8. Continue to Involve Your Community
- Internal Change

*Collaborative collection development may ultimately be one of the best ways to ensure that community members see themselves reflected in the library. When people actually choose items that will go in the collection, they get to see themselves reflected on the shelf. They get to say, "I chose that item for the library. It's my library."*

- Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

## Definition

Collection development within the Community-Led Service Planning Model is simply the application of the service model to the collection development process. Collection development in this context gives community members the lead in building collections that reflect their needs and interests. It engages the community collaboratively in every step of the process, from needs identification, through materials selection, to evaluation and beyond.

## Rationale

Librarians work to develop collections that are both a reflection of community needs and an unbiased, comprehensive representation of a given subject. Yet across the country, the Working Together Project staff heard many times that socially excluded community members do not see themselves reflected in their libraries' collections.

Libraries have relied on a number of approaches to build collections, from analysis of community demographics to collection use analysis and community surveys. These approaches have been most successful at understanding the needs of active library users and those who are included in mainstream society. To build collections that meet the needs of socially excluded communities, libraries must adopt new approaches—approaches that position the community members as the experts in understanding their needs.

## Application

The following steps outline one of the ways a community-led collection development process works. Once you have had a bit of practice in the area, discuss with your colleagues other ideas that could work in your community. Always spend time reflecting on what worked well and what did not.

### 1. Establish Relationships in the Community

In order to develop collections with the community, it is important to establish relationships with community members directly. *Tool 3: Relationship Building* and *Tool 4: Partnerships* will give you ideas of how to do this.

### 2. Gauge Interest

Your casual discussions with community members will reveal many of their needs and interests. When it seems appropriate, you can ask them whether they would be interested in participating in collection development. For example, a group of teens discussing astrology might be interested in selecting materials in this area. Ask them if they would like to help the library buy astrology books. It may take some community members a while to warm to this idea, and others may simply not be interested. You may need to introduce the idea gradually or gauge interest over a period of time as your relationships deepen.

### 3. Assess Needs with the Community

If the interest is there, begin discussing community members' collection needs more formally. Your method will depend on the community members with whom you are working. They may want to be involved in casual discussions about the collection or they may want to hold one or more organised meetings. Let the group decide how to discuss collection development and what issues to explore. Some group members may want to jump right into selecting materials. Others may begin by discussing factors that impact the collection's relevance to themselves, including how the collection is accessed or how it is displayed. Collaborative collection development is meant to be an exploratory process where community members consider any and all possibilities, regardless of library limitations. Encourage community members to participate and share ideas, but be careful not to create the impression that the library is promising to act on every suggestion that is made.

Organising spaces and times for groups to meet can be challenging. If you are already meeting a group through a service provider, then the service provider's space may be easily available and the best choice. If not, other locations will have to be considered and discussed. Consider spaces such as neighbourhood church basements, housing complex meeting rooms, community centres, playing fields, or an inexpensive café.



THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE DEMONSTRATES HOW ONE PROJECT LIBRARIAN ADAPTED THE NEEDS IDENTIFICATION PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

#### EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

*Some of the employment resources offered at the larger area branches were identified by the community as being important, even critical, for them to access at the local branch. Unfortunately, some of the smaller neighbourhood branches do not get all the items they may need and so rely on referrals to larger downtown branches to meet community needs. In the community I worked with, many of the people who needed material housed at other branches found it difficult to visit the larger branches, which were outside the neighbourhood. Our distribution system further complicated the community's ability to access the employment resources they wanted and needed.*

*In order to build a local collection that reflected the community's needs, as well as acknowledge that many community members are uncomfortable leaving the neighbourhood, we arranged further consultation and collaboration with the community.*

*A focus group was held to discuss newcomers' needs for employment-related materials. Focus group participants identified some collection needs and discussed how difficult it is for people to wait for a hold to come in when actively looking for work. Focus group participants also stated that they needed to borrow the materials, so they were not as apt to use the non-circulating reference library material.*

*We are now preparing a report based on the results of these focus groups. It will include recommendations to change purchasing patterns for employment materials at the two branches and to have "holds exempt" circulating copies. We anticipate collaborating further with community members to identify and select materials covering specific occupations and professions that interest them.*

- Sonia Pacheco, Community Development Librarian

## 4. Critique Your Collection

Getting feedback on your existing collection can occur either before or after assessing needs. Gaining feedback before can limit community members' ability to explore their needs fully, as they might find it harder to imagine possibilities beyond the existing collection. Other community members may feel more confident exploring their collection needs if they have some context, so they may prefer to critique the collection beforehand. Gaining feedback from community members does not have to be a formal process. For example, community members might provide critiques casually in conversation.

Assessing the collection in a more structured way will depend on the group with whom you are working. If community members are interested in visiting the branch as a group, you can arrange a branch tour where they can see the collection on the shelf. They can then critique other aspects of the collection, such as how it is displayed or how easy it is to find an item. Some groups may be hesitant to conduct such a visit when the branch is open, so you may want to arrange a visit when the branch is closed.

Not all groups will want or be able to visit the branch. You can bring materials representative of the collection with you when visiting service providers or community groups and critique them in that context, or you can hold an informal focus group to do this in a more structured way. It is not necessary for a group to see the whole collection, as it is hard to imagine any group that would have the stamina to look through every item in a collection. Showing them a sampling should give them what they need in order to form a working impression of your collection. In addition to the ideas outlined here, try borrowing ideas from *Tool 3: Relationship Building* as a way of soliciting the group's feedback.

## 5. Select and Acquire Materials

Selecting and acquiring materials can be done a number of ways, depending on how community members want to do it and the resources you have. Some community members might only want to go so far as making suggestions, while others might enjoy doing everything including purchasing the items. There are ways to address these differences, and you may need to use several approaches with the same group.

- Look through catalogues together and select items for purchase.
- Go on shopping trips. Take a group to a store to select and purchase items for the collection.
- Go on online shopping trips. Use a website like Amazon to generate a list of items to purchase.
- If community members are unsure of specific titles they want, discuss subjects and formats that interested them, and then return with a list of suggestions to consider.
- Have group members talk to people they know to generate other suggestions.
- Ask community members if there are other ways they would like to select materials.

Your role in community-led collection development is to facilitate the process of building collections that are relevant to and representative of the community. This involves everything from providing catalogues to helping community members understand the library philosophy and collection development theory that informs selection activities.



## 6. Evaluate Continuously

Evaluation in the Community-Led Service Planning Model is ongoing and involves evaluating and altering the process as the need arises. Through every step of the collection development process, ask participants if the process is working for them. If it is not, adjust the process and activities according to their suggestions.

## 7. Celebrate

Once materials have been selected and purchased, determine with community members how to acknowledge the achievement. This is an opportunity to discuss the collection and the entire process of building it. It is also an opportunity for the library to formally recognise the benefits of collaborative partnerships with the community.

Discuss a celebration with your community members.

- Plan an event where participants open the boxes of items they have selected, view the new collection, and discuss whether or not the materials meet their expectations.
- Organise an unveiling at the branch once the collection is on the shelves. Like the branch tours, this event could be held during closed hours, if this works best for the group. The group should also have a chance to discuss whether or not the materials meet their expectations.
- Hold an event where branch staff come to a community space to display some of the items purchased. This strengthens the link between community members and the material and demonstrates that library materials are meant to be in the community.

## 8. Continue to Involve Your Community

As with collections, community involvement is not static. One of the aims of community-led service planning is to establish and maintain meaningful, ongoing connections between a community and its library. Activities like collaborative collection development build relationships that last beyond the activity itself. Explore how else the community members you are working with might want to be involved with the library.

- Does the group want to develop a program to highlight the collection they have built?
- Are they interested in planning a program in some other area?
- Do they want to be involved in other collection development initiatives?
- Are there other aspects of the library that interest them, such as policy development or facilities planning that they would like to participate in?

 THE FOLLOWING PAGE HAS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW COMMUNITIES HAVE INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIONS.

*flip it over* 

## ABORIGINAL COLLECTION

*A private donor approached the library offering a substantial grant to expand the Aboriginal collection at the Working Together Project's site branch.*

*To make the collection development process a community-led one, I began by going to Aboriginal groups in the community and asking questions. The questions I asked first did not address the collection, but rather if and how community members wanted to be involved. It was important to begin by placing control of the process in the community's hands, so that it could reflect their ways of working, and not the library's. It was impossible to avoid getting suggestions for the collection anyway. Some people were so interested in the idea that they wanted to start building a collection right away.*

*Nonetheless, I did hear a lot about how to structure the process. In order to have full community support, several people said it was essential for me to inform elders in the three local bands of what the library was doing. Others suggested specific events or meetings I could attend in order to connect with the community. Still others suggested that holding community forums would be the best way to involve the community. I also heard about considerations that I might not have thought of otherwise. For example, Aboriginal communities may not think of themselves in the same geographic terms by which our library systems are bound.*

*I met several people who were interested in setting up a community forum, and I have followed up on the suggestions community members have made so far. For example, I contacted the offices of the three bands mentioned earlier.*

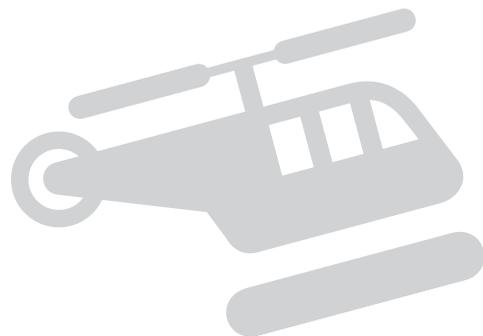
*This is an ongoing project. The next step will be to hold one or more community forums, where the focus will be on the community controlling the process of building this collection—not just the items in the collection, but also the collection's purpose and scope.*

– Randy Gatley, Community Development Librarian

## Internal Change

Some staff members might initially be resistant to involving the community in collection development. They may identify collection development with their expertise as librarians and be reluctant to surrender that expertise. Some librarians may feel that community members do not have the necessary grounding in library philosophy and so cannot make appropriate material selections. Some may also suggest that the quality of the collection will be degraded if non-professionals select materials. Successful community-led collection development begins with library staff understanding the importance of community involvement in library activities.

Initiating community-led collection development practices may mean you need to challenge existing selection practices. Some libraries have inflexible ordering systems that cannot immediately be adapted to community-led collection development. Other systems may have selection processes that could be immediately modified to allow for community participation. Being thoughtful, creative, and willing to change will ensure that your community's voice is central to your collections. This, in turn, ensures that your library's collection is inclusive of the whole community's needs and wants.



***hang on!***



**Working  
Together**