



better together

Creating Partnerships for Community Learning

Better Together Conference Overview and Guidelines for Developing Community Partnerships

Overview

The goal of the Better Together Conference is to assist California public library teams in providing “free-choice learning” opportunities for their communities. “Free-choice learning” opportunities are those opportunities—not connected with formal education—that individuals seek either to educate themselves or express themselves culturally. These opportunities should be geared to their specific needs, thus allowing them to gain skills and knowledge essential to maintain and/or improve the quality of their lives.

The Better Together Conference concept was determined as a response to expressed concerns of both community and library leaders in interviews and recent reports emphasizing the need for learning as an invaluable coping skill in today’s complex society. At the same time that the need is so great for increased skills, recent statistics published in *Reading At Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, a 2004 publication of the National Endowment for the Arts, show that essential skills and knowledge of all Americans are at risk due to declining participation in literary and arts activities.

Since the Better Together Conference focus is based in large part on the premise showcased in *The Urban Conference and Urban Libraries Council 2003 publication, Partnerships for Free Choice Learning: Public Libraries, Museums and Public Broadcasters Working Together* (<http://tinyurl.com/d28ja>) — that libraries need to

- 1) expand offerings to current users and/or broaden their appeal to reach new users
- 2) foster creative opportunities for “free-choice learning” in their communities through partnerships with museums and public broadcasters.

Priority will be given to applications that involve museums and public broadcasters as partners.

April 8-10, 2006
Cerritos Public Library
Cerritos, California

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Guidelines for Developing Community Partnerships

Partnering Is A Strategic Tool:

- It flows out of the library's mission and vision
- It is a library-wide strategy
- It is centrally coordinated
- It is a formal process

Definition Of Partnership: Libraries have collaborative relationships with many community entities. To acknowledge the importance of all library-community relationships, but to differentiate between the levels of library-partner involvement, the Williamsburg Regional Library has defined the term "partnership" to include four types of relationships: glances, dates, engagements, and marriages.

- **Glance:** any overture or contact between the library and a community group
- **Date:** an agreement between the library and a community partner to accomplish a specific short-term activity or commitment.
- **Engagement:** an agreement between the library and a community partner to work together toward a marriage after an initial experimental phase. Engagements are temporal: they either evolve into a marriage, dissolve, or downsize to a date.
- **Marriage:** a formal agreement between the library and a community partner with compatible goals, to share the work, share the risk, and share the results or proceeds. The library and the community partner jointly invest in resources, experience mutual benefits, and share risk, responsibility, authority, and accountability. Marriages are formed for the long-term benefit to the partners.

Potential Partners:

- Businesses
- Civic groups
- Nonprofit organizations – local, state, national
- Schools and colleges
- Libraries
- Government agencies – local, state, federal

Reasons To Use The Partnership Tool:

- Reach new library users
- Reach current library patrons in a new way
- Tap into community assets and strengths
- Gain support for library resources/programs
- Gain valuable feedback
- Create new library resources

Guidelines for Developing Community Partnerships (continued)

Steps In Choosing A Partner:

1. Know what you want to achieve for your library through partnering and why
2. Troll the community and make a short list of potential partners
3. Guide your partner selection based on the following:
 - What is the partner's mission and does it overlap with the library's
 - What is the partner's position in the community
 - Who are the groups or segments of the community served by the partner
 - What sort of resources – assets and strengths – might this partnership bring to the relations and project goals
 - What are the partner's strategic directions
 - Who are the leaders in this organization
 - Does the timing seem right
 - What is the partner's corporate cultural and can you work together
 - Is the partners planning and budget cycling one you can work with
 - Are unique opportunities arising

From "Partnering with Purpose: a guide to strategic partnership development for libraries and other organizations"

By Janet L. Crowther and Barry Trott (Libraries Unlimited, 2004)