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The New Mission
for Public Libraries

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for Public Libraries

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https://referencelibrarian.org

Dedication

To nonprofit organizations and the public library.

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Acknowledgments

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Foreword

Overheard in an elevator, inside a big New York City hospital, a senior resident speaking to a junior: "Around here we have an expression - you need to go fast enough to keep up, but not so fast you leave it all behind."

In the rush to keep up with our lives, some of us, some of the time, may leave behind the one thing that surrounds us wherever we live - community.

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Introduction

Library Community Network (LCN) is a plan that places the local public library at the center of an effort to network and promote nonprofit resources that serve the community.

The plan begins with the library creating a directory listing of nonprofit organizations, and proceeds by taking actions that encourage collaboration and community involvement.

Why libraries and nonprofits?

Libraries are valued for their skills in information gathering and dissemination, and organizations are valued for the content and services they provide: both are valued for the active concern they have for local community. Pairing these two is both useful and practical: one for having the potential to make culture and services more visible, and the other for enabling individuals to better satisfy their needs and desires.

In its implementation, this program is a bit sneaky: create a library directory and new relationships can form that help the public library and nonprofit organizations to become more relevant and responsive to evolving community needs.

All it takes is a shift in how information is managed.

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Library Community Network

Public Library
at the center of the
Community
is the nonprofit resource
Network

As the future arrives, communities will
need to be better equipped at assessing
risks and utilizing resources.
This may require some new programs, but
will necessitate restructuring of existing
administrative functions.

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Public Library Blues

Preparing for the future today means managing the *process of engaging* change as much as managing the *effects* of change.

*P*oor public libraries, scrambling to establish relevancy in the information age. Talk about irony: what could be more information-oriented than a library? But, alas, information has become a commodity, marketed, sold, and bought as any product on the open market. Or given away. What's a library to do?

Katrina vanden Heuvel in a 2018 opinion piece for the Washington Post, *Want to defend democracy? Start with your public library*, detailed a few, if not commonly known, at least commonly discussed points of concern about public libraries. "Local libraries are struggling to stay open, and funding for local libraries is on the chopping block." And, "Earlier this year, the administration moved to cut funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In late August (2018), the Senate, rebuffing the administration, approved a funding increase for the institute."

However, she says, people do use their local library. "Pew Research Center recently found that 87 percent of millennials say the library 'helps them find information that is trustworthy and reliable.' Seventy-four percent of baby boomers say the same." Ms. vanden Heuvel writes that teenagers study, seniors visit to socialize, people go to the library to get online, and in some cases, can obtain career training and job preparation.

So where's the disconnect? If people do indeed make use of their local public library, why are many libraries struggling to stay afloat? The answer in a word: Relevancy. It can be a hard sell to justify tax dollars to fund an institution whose prime focus historically has been locating information and lending books.

Try as they might, public libraries have not had an easy time putting on a convincing presentation, one that shows they now perform other needed functions.

Looking through a rearview mirror

Today there are about 9,000 public library systems and 17,000 library outlets in the U.S.. Facilities serve anywhere from 3 million users (Los Angeles County), to under 10 (Frenchboro Public Library off the coast of Maine). And of the 9,000 library systems, about 2,000 of them have fewer than 1,000 users, and 2,500 libraries have over 10,000 users.

These data are from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (2016), a U.S. government database, and it's interesting to note some of the categories of information that are recorded. For example, the database tracks the kinds of lending taking place - the number of videos, e-books, paper books, and so on - but beyond street address and population numbers, information regarding the *communities* these libraries serve is scarce.

More information regarding the local community culture could be useful to library administrators in helping them to better serve community needs. As it stands, what they have access to shows community needs in relation to what libraries currently understand their service options to be – e.g. media loans, children's' programming, internet access, meeting and event space – but not on local character that might indicate what a community may want.

The American Library Association (ALA) offers extensive library usage analysis plus a library full of resources that addresses cultural shifts and social needs for all the different kinds of libraries, academic, school, and public. This includes addressing the issue of library relevance. For example, this snippet from ALA's *The State of America's Libraries, 2015*: "The number of states reporting library branch closures is down, from 10 states reporting knowledge of closures to only five this year." A relatively good sign, I suppose.

Data relationships

There is no question that, historically, libraries were a necessity when it came to disseminating information. And that for almost 200 years in this country, communities embraced the calling to make knowledge widely available. But today, universal availability is exactly what the Internet provides.

It is no secret that the proliferation of networked computers and small portable electronic devices has forced libraries to find new ways of being relevant. And one response was that libraries began to look for new ways to satisfy local needs.

But while systems track what library offerings people use, there is perhaps less focus on tracking what their patrons' issues - needs and wants are. Given the library's intimate position in local communities, it certainly seems more of this could be done. This isn't to fault the ALA or local libraries – they sometimes do seek patron's opinions – but just to say, community needs and desires are more than just the sum of their printed and e-book loans.

A new direction

Awareness of community vulnerabilities and resource allocation could become increasingly important should critical social and economic changes occur and public libraries are called to act.

It's the practical assistance in a constantly changing world that can take on a more serious note, representing more difficult challenges. The question then is: How can the local public library best address real needs of individuals in the community? It may be that new library functions, more directly connected to local resources, will produce the most relevant outcomes.

This is where the reference librarian comes in.

Here's what the American Library Association has to say about reference librarians: "Reference librarians recommend,

interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help patrons with specific information needs. Requests for assistance often occur in person at the library, reference is increasingly conducted by phone, chat and email. In small libraries all librarians may be called upon to perform reference duties; in large and/or academic libraries reference services may be highly specialized. A Career in Reference Services . . . Is for Everyone!"

That sounds pretty straightforward and functionally relevant.

Here's a quote from Rebekkah Smith Aldrich of the Mid-Hudson New York Library System in a 2016 *Publisher's Weekly* article. "Waiting for people to come and ask us a question has been and continues to be a recipe for irrelevance. Today, we need targeted efforts that speak to where people's passions and aspirations lie. We need to target the unique things we can corner the market on locally: reader advisory, homework help, digital fluency, local history, hackerspaces, and working outside of our buildings with collaborators to make our communities more sustainable and resilient." This certainly sounds relevant in terms of addressing practical needs.

As to what reference librarians actually reference - in many libraries, reference books like encyclopedias, dictionaries, or *The Complete Guide to Birds of The West*, are being thrown in the recycle bin.

In a very real sense, the position of reference librarian is a representative symbol for what is happening to public libraries in general, and that includes what the future may hold in terms of services needed and offered.

The ways in which the functions of reference librarians could change in order to be more useful in a new world, actually points the way for the library to gain increased relevancy. Reference - or referring people to needed resources - should become a central focus of the new public library. Relevancy may simply be a matter of redefining the word: reference.

Of, by, and for the community

The position of the reference librarian should become the central go-to function for the local community, a kind of "information booth" representing not just factual information but also networking and resource availability within the community. The process of managing these information relationships should be part of an ongoing library-community relationship.

As environments change, the library needs to go where community residents are headed.

We could say that preparing for the future means managing the *process* of engaging change as much as managing the *effects* of change. This means looking at process as well as program: A directory of local resources enables a process of interaction between the library, nonprofits, and residence, which in turn can influence how resources are managed - programs.

It is the business of public libraries to provide information services to their communities, and it is in community's best interest to support services that address community needs. Public libraries are the main local information resource. They can and should commit to serving communities in ways that directly address ongoing social, economic, and cultural change.

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Resources

*I*f you are not aware of many nonprofit services and don't automatically think of them as your own personal resource, it may be because, unless you go looking, many of them simply are not that visible. Being visible , or invisible, has several causes, among them: size of community (one organization can get lost in a medium-to-large city), advertising (nonprofits often have very limited funds to spend on advertising), staffing (nonprofits often have limited paid employees and volunteer-sustained organizations may have few skilled people for marketing or networking), and competition (in a crowded field, many organizations are competing for funding and attention).

Active members of nonprofit organizations are often inspired, and are usually experienced locally committed individuals who really like what they do. Nonprofit community groups offer some of the best local resources a community could wish for. Whether it's the volunteer ambulance service, chess club, or food bank, they actively engage with the local population, trying to fulfill what people need or want.

Nonprofit services and activities are the unseen glue communities depend on to help hold the fabric of life together. Nonprofits are where the individual meets the resource community.

Community resources, like the ones supplied by nonprofit organizations, can represent a significant advantage for people in many ways - social, economic, and cultural. Just one example, an article by the American Sociological Review (2017, Vol. 82), Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime, states in part, "Instead of seeing the drop in violent crime solely as the result of a set of external processes, forces, and policies imposed on communities where violence was concentrated,

their stories expand the focus to the role that communities played in responding to the challenge of violence through the development of local efforts and local organizations."

Another report from The School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs at George Mason University makes the following points: "Park and recreation agencies contribute to their local economies in a variety of ways. Strong park and recreation departments generate significant direct and indirect economic impacts through their employment and spending, and proximity to well-maintained parks can boost property values…park and recreation departments can collaborate with local and other organizations to promote their contributions to economic development."

There are many indicators that demonstrate direct and indirect positive effects nonprofit organizations can have on society. Having access to, and knowledge of, these resources is one way people can gain a "competitive" advantage, socially and economically.

Relationships

Good community planning is about creating structure that enables services to increase positive interactions, ones that effectively promote recognition. When this works, it can lead to a feeling of belonging.

*A*ppreciating networked resources and how dependent we are on them is a foundation for a library community network (LCN). LCN is an idea, a pathway that connects nonprofit resources to the local community and the public library. The centerpiece of this network is a directory listing of local nonprofits.

Typically, a directory listing does just that – list things. This one can do much more. LCN connects people to community-based nonprofits, but it also enables other social

pathways. It enables an *active* network, one that uses human interaction to function. It enhances old relationships and encourages new ones, some that might never exist otherwise.

LCN also makes it easier for communities to adjust resources to meet social, economic, and environmental changes. It enables everyone – residents, local government, and organizations – to see virtually all the resources that are available to a community. Exactly how it does all this is a focus of this book.

Examples of these resources includes things like, volunteer ambulance services, book clubs, food banks, senior centers, little leagues, pet rescue services – everything that can be offered a community by nonprofit organizations.

Discussed here are the three major components necessary to unhide these resources: the local public library (the community center for information), a network that facilitates communication and interaction (LCN directory), nonprofit organizations (and the personal relationships integral to both libraries and nonprofit organizations).

Relationship to discovery

It's often the case that there are more unique kinds of services and activities available, things like social clubs, interest groups, hobby groups, elder and infirm help, food banks, and so on. Some of these are well known, and some are not so easy to see.

Libraries know this. That's why they have increased sponsoring events, and have catalog displays to give exposure to various groups and organizations. These are all good things to do, and are heading in the right direction, but libraries need to go further.

It may sound strange to say, but resource options are like money in the bank, where the value of the "money" grows only if you spend it. In practice, however, there's a problem: most communities don't tell you where the bank is. It's up to you to find it.

Finding something of interest in your community can be

a challenge, especially when it's not apparent how or where to look. Where does one go in order to get a comprehensive view of all that is available where you live? In many communities, there is often no good answer to this question. Resources need a place to gather - a directory (and a library).

Directories can't do it alone: nonprofit resources need to engage with the local public library. And that means the reference librarian needs to become the Community Network Reference.

Local network vs. the Internet

Google searches, even when they offer a possibility, don't bring anyone directly to a social connection. What about Facebook and their ilk? Can't they help promote connections that lead to actual socializing? Of course they can, but they're not designed to do that (they are designed to not do that).

There are big differences between meeting online and a networking group in a bar or social group. For one, meeting in a social space, like a book club or as a volunteer in a fire station, is more engaging. Online, and connecting in the physical world, offer different insights; they are not the same in-depth experience as engaging on a local level.

A directory listing of local nonprofit services and activities is not socializing either, but unlike online network services, local nonprofit organizations actually exist in your community, and often do connect, person-to-person. One outstandingly different online networking service is Meetup.com, which functions *only* to bring people together physically, based on common shared interests.

Local nonprofits often function *only* with human-to-human contact – that's just the way they work and why they are effective.

Another problem with searching online for local resources is that a community resource listing can easily be buried in the massive numbers of commercial listings, and lost even amongst the larger nonprofit services: a little fish in

a big pond. Online social media can show us many things about the communities we live in, but a locally focused online directory, tailored to a specific community, can create a clearer picture of *exactly* what is available.

There can be many reasons why local nonprofit resources are not visible: Many organizations do not have advertising budgets, they don't have buildings on Main Street, and they may have limited, if unique, appeal to a relatively small part of the population. One way or another, they're often easy to overlook.

A directory is a first step

When it comes to resources, you can't make use of what you don't know exists. The idea of a directory is relatively easy to describe, however, *networking* community resources is not. That's because it is difficult to clearly show how organizations can make use of communication pathways not yet created. The results of the public library and various nonprofits working together and exploring new ways of addressing peoples' needs and desires are essentially unplanned; they evolve organically.

I can hear the questions: "I get that communities evolve, but still - a directory listing? Isn't that an archaic idea, what with social media and the Internet? And do I really need to know about every itsy-bitsy-teeny thing concerning where I live?" The purpose of this book is not only to address these questions, but to expand on the idea of what reliance on local resources can mean for the health of a community (including the library).

The idea of sharing resources is not new, but placing public libraries at the center of networked local resources is: it's a paradigm shift in thinking.

Good community planning is about creating structure that enables services to increase positive interactions, ones that effectively promote recognition. When this works, it can lead to a feeling of belonging.

Librarians should now refer to patrons in a more direct and personal way, relating more to personal needs in a way that connects them to local resources including local entrepreneurs and community activists.

This relationship between resource reference and the local community becomes a two-way pathway when everyone is not just connected, but engaged: nonprofits are speaking with the library staff, and the library staff is reaching out to nonprofits: relationships are being formed, ideas exchanged, and plans made that further engage the community.

Regardless of whether the library has a reference librarian position or not, someone can act as a liaison between the various nonprofit resources and the community as well as people coming into the library. These are conversations that can take place both in overseeing the resources and in determining what a patron is looking for. These are all opportunities for everyone to get to know each other, and to perhaps, not just connect, but reconnect information in different, new and unexpected ways.

All these interactions can be significant because they can lead to residents feeling a greater connection with, not only the library, but with local people, those representing nonprofit resources. The potential exists for everyone to become better acquainted, regardless of whether the patron finds what they are looking for at that moment or not. Practically speaking, it's really a case of the needs that communities have for resources being matched up with the needs that public libraries have for relevance. It's a dual win.

Broadly speaking, communities need active and engaging enablers - public libraries and nonprofit organizations - to become engaged with a changing world environment. And libraries need to find relevant ways to utilize the skill sets they were born with: information management within the context of community life.

The beauty of using both the local public library and nonprofit organizations that serve community is that these

resources – the information overseer, and the inspired service and activity providers - are already embedded in the community. Networking these two is just making better use of what already exists.

Put yet another way: libraries are valued for their skills in information gathering and dissemination, organizations are valued for the content they provide, and both are valued for the active concern they have for local community. Pairing these two is both useful and practical: one for having the potential to make culture and services more accessible, and the other for enabling individuals to better satisfy their needs.

Promoting more effective networking between libraries and local resources can lead to an enhanced appreciation of what makes a community healthy, and how communities can function in ways that satisfy more people.

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The Directory

A community directory of local resources is not the same path or process that one uses for a search of the lowest plane-fare or best-rated cellphone.

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*a*directory is like a path through a forest. A path is especially useful if your skills at navigating are not very good, or if the forest is large and dense. A directory can be reassuring; it is, after all, a path you can follow.

Directories are boring. Who wants to read lists of things, unless you are searching for something specific, and you *must* look at one. Looking at a directory is work: the reward must be apparent to want to go down the path. Directories are useless remnants of the past pre-digital, pre-Internet world. Google it, Bing it, but don't waste time looking through page after page of stuff that isn't necessary to look at.

Directories? Get a life!

Precisely. A directory of community-based services and activities is a path - however not just through any old forest, but to those people and resources that are around you, and are here for you. A forest that represents many different real-life real-world options.

A community directory of local resources is not the same path or process that one uses for a search of the lowest plane-fare or best-rated cellphone. A directory of local nonprofits is certainly not personal contact, but facilitating personal connections is one of its main purposes. It does this in two ways: it provides a path a person can follow, often to a locally based person, and it allows the viewer to see all of the resources that are available, all in one place. And this goes for nonprofit organizations as well: they all can see what is being offered by the other nonprofits - the community they are a part of. It's a two-way street.

Using this directory listing often requires contact with a human being on a local level: you wouldn't want it any other way. Algorithms are great tools in a volatile environment when change is the order every moment of every day, but relationships don't change *that* fast, and where you live should not feel *that* impersonal.

Directory listings endure, Google search results

evaporate. The resources local people provide don't change as often as prices or phone features, therefore a directory can maintain its relevance over much longer stretches of time. Once established, community directories can easily be maintained using few resources.

Boring is as boring does
(*Forest Gump*: "Stupid is as stupid does.")

But that still leaves the "boring" issue, because even though a directory listing may have relevance in this instant direct-to-me gratification results-oriented world, if the local citizens don't find this tool interesting, and consequently not many people use it, a directory is as good as not being there.

And so you, the library administrator or concerned citizen, will work on the website in order to create an attractive-looking directory in the hope that visitors to the site will become inspired enough to browse the listings in search of personal growth, needed assistance, or perhaps a little entertainment. And so you should, but if that's where your efforts to engage people stop, you've missed the main point of the directory and the real impact that it can have.

This directory has other purposes besides directing people: it's an enabler of relationships. The idea of a community network should not end with a listing – it should begin with a listing. Interactions with a directory do have a defined purpose – to connect people to resources – but other things should happen as a result of these interactions: libraries become familiar with the local people that make up local nonprofits, nonprofits become more familiar with their library, and new insights into people's needs and wants emerge.

Over time, interactions can result in unique collaborations that mix resources with people in new ways.

For a library, developing relationships with those who are active in the community is as important as making resources easier to access.

This is the "secret" agenda of the community network

directory – interaction - and it can roll out in many ways. Here are a few examples:

- *Speaking* with or emailing local nonprofits informing them of the directory listing.
- *Discussing* plans to assist nonprofits' needs for volunteers beyond listing in the directory (like displays in the library).
- *Engaging* with nonprofits to enable collaborative efforts, like shared events at the library.

Different kinds of personal interactions can lead to other even more engaging interactions between the library, organizations, and local citizens. It is these interactive relationships that may not be apparent at first, but may produce creative and beneficial results as time goes on.

To be successful, it will be important to make the function of promoting communication for all, apparent to all. There should be nothing hidden about making people feel welcome, and about promoting the value of community resources and the dedicated efforts of those who offer them.

Call it marketing, call it being informative, but the additional purpose of offering a directory is to bring people together, giving everyone an "excuse" to participate – in community, and with nonprofit functions. As the architectural metaphor states, "form follows function," in this case, let the directory show the way to improved interaction and communication between all who use it.

It does not matter who you are - an individual concerned about community development, global issues, or a library director addressing relevancy - involvement in local community is the same social responsibility.

The collective view of a community's resources can also add to the attractiveness of a community - how a community is perceived by outsiders. A community offering a more complete view of, and a better connection to resources, can appear more attractive to visitors and those considering moving into the community.

The Library Community Network is a win-win-win situation, benefiting the library, nonprofits, and the people who are the community.

Creating a directory

Interested citizen, library director, whoever you are, let's say you decide to start. What will life be like if you set out on this journey of creating a community directory of nonprofits? This is a good question to ask because in fact, it is a journey. And this is true regardless of the size of your community, or the size of your listing of nonprofits.

Creating a directory and following the path that it offers can bring you many things, some you may truly value, other results you may learn to avoid in the future. The beauty of this networking idea is this: you can start slow, take it as far as you want, and change it later if needed. It's all possible, but before you begin, convince yourself you don't need to know everything when you start; you will learn as you go. This is a journey of discovery, if for no other reason, because it is likely that no one else you know has done this before.

Planning for scale

You will need to determine the size of the area to be covered, e.g., village, town, city, county. There are at least two things to consider in doing this: the coverage area that will make sense to everyone who uses the directory, and your working relationship, if any, with other libraries.

Ultimately, the key to success will lie in how each listed nonprofit resource is categorized and indexed. This can include a map with the listing. But keep in mind that big city or small village, notebook or web-based listing, the goal is to foster personal connections: when people are engaged with the process of relating – one group to another, one person to a group, or person-to-person – there is an opportunity to create a sense of connection and belonging.

The style

You will need to determine the kinds of information to be collected and the manner in which listings will be displayed. A listing should show more than just a link to an organization's website. For instance, it could include contact information, information on whether the organization uses volunteers or not, or has regularly scheduled meetings, when these meetings occur, and so on.

You do not need the latest technology in order to promote community networking. It is also not necessary to be a librarian or a member of a nonprofit organization. I was representing neither a library nor a nonprofit when I created three directories. I didn't even live near two of them. Anyone can start this community service.

How you go about implementing this will vary depending on your geographical location, the resources available to you, the culture of your community, and the kinds of nonprofit resources in your area. Here is the basic idea.

- First, get your feet wet: speak with a few nonprofit groups that service your area, introduce yourself and ask for feedback. Email everyone you speak with.
- Make a feasibility assessment and plan ahead. There are steps that will require time and effort before you can announce a start date.
- Make a list of all the nonprofit service and activity groups that serve your area. At the same time, create a contact list.

- Create major categories for your listings. Here are ones I have used:

> Children and Family
> Culture and Arts
> Education and Health
> Elder Services
> Environment, & Nature
> Food Assistance
> Housing Assistance
> Job, Work & Business
> Legal Assistance
> Local Government Services
> Social, Fun & Play
> Volunteers Wanted

A successful directory will require an educational component that can include descriptive literature and signage in the library to help explain and encourage the process of learning what the community has to offer. How information is presented to the library employee can be as critical to the success of the directory service as the way in which information is presented to the patron.

A directory listing is an organization's opportunity to make a personal statement to the community. Organizations may not realize the potential for outreach the listing has, so this step in creating a listing statement should be explained and emphasized.

Contacts

Consider collecting the following information when listing an organization:

- The group's preferred way of being contacted by those responding to a directory listing.
- Any designated contact person available to answer questions from the public.
- Any interest in meeting with other groups in order to explore collaborative projects.
- Does the group accept volunteers, and if so, is there a person contact for such information?
- Would the organization consider participating in an annual nonprofit festival day?
- Does the group present programs in the local public library? If not, is this something they might consider doing?

Three "little" words

A directory should be efficient, interesting, and informing.

- Efficient: The method used to dispense information should be accessible, and the process of using the directory should be intuitive, as well as simple to use. Ideally the user should require little or no explanation to retrieve what he or she is looking for.
- Interesting: The directory should be attractive, and using it should be engaging – consider adding something in the way of a personal touch – photos of those involved in this project, a story or Blog of how it all began, a letter explaining why you think a directory is important.
- Informing: The user should see essential information about each organization without having to sift through extraneous material.

Design suggestions

- Provide a thumbnail image for each listed group on the main webpage of the directory. This allows everyone – patrons, casual web users, as well as listed organizations – to better view and appreciate the entirety of what is offered to the community.
- Provide an index, a list of key words that link to specific listings, things like: Assisted Living, Camping, Child Support, Farmers Market, Housing Help, Picnic, Speech & Hearing, Veterans Assistance, Yoga. Index key words should act as a filter.
- Provide a word search.
- Offer a way to browse by establish major categories, like: Arts, Nature & Parks, Housing, Social Meetings, Education & Health, or Culture & Arts.
- Consider adding other functions like an events calendar, a "volunteers needed" list, featuring a group of the month. These can add to the overall usefulness and appeal.

Software

As to the directory software platform, websites come in various styles, from professionally built and maintained, to WordPress-styled sites, and no-cost simple blog software like Google's BlogSpot.

There are two popular and free website development tools: WordPress (wordpress.org), and Blogger (blogger.com). WordPress is the nonprofit branch of a for-profit business, and Blogger is a free service owned by Google.

Of the two, Blogger is the easier to use, but offers fewer options than the more sophisticated WordPress. It is a trade-off. If you are willing to learn a more complex system, you can offer more features; if you want to keep things simple for a smaller service, Blogger may be the way to go.

Practical experience

The city I chose to test my idea has about 24,000 residents. This was my first attempt at creating a directory and my first relationship with a public library. The library director was enthusiastic, the website functioned as designed, and it had a modest regular usage in terms of unique visitors (https://peekskilllcn.net).

A new library director did not wish to participate thereby severely limiting the possibilities. All this directory does is list nonprofits by category and key word or index. A lot is missing. The following is a list of the things that could have been, but did not happen.

- Events calendar.
- Organization information other than what was culled from a website, things like a unique message to those using the directory, or a more personal way to connect such as a unique email, phone, or contact form.
- Free or shared resources; a user login for listed organizations so they can post items they want to make available to other nonprofits, such as office equipment or space.
- News blog for announcements.
- Newsletter sign-up page, for cumulative organization updates sent to any user of the site.
- Nonprofit Community Festival: a street fair event that informs and celebrates the nonprofits servicing the community.
- Library displays of local nonprofits, periodically showcasing different organizations.
- Library bulletin board displaying events and notices from nonprofits.
- Availability of the directory inside the library, and training of staff in how to use it when assisting patrons.

Community snapshots

A community that has an online directory listing of nonprofit resources also has - for everyone to see and

contemplate - a snapshot of itself. Communities have other snapshots – demographic statistics, local businesses and coupon packets - but as for grasping the more personal aspects of a community, the directory snapshot offers a more genuine sense of what a place is like: a feeling for the whole.

You can learn a lot from this picture, and just like a photo snapshot, there are several ways you can display this "community family album:" for example, on posters, brochures, or even in a paperback. Creating different forms of the snapshot view can offer more opportunities for everyone to understand and appreciate where they live and what their resource options are.

`Directory book`

Once an online directory is created, it's not difficult to create a paperback directory – just copy the text into a Word document, and upload it for a *print on demand* book (kdp.amazon.com - makes it easy).

Screenshots from an actual publication show indexing and categories, both with corresponding page numbers.

Community Dependence

Being the central administrator for information, the public library should also be the central connector to resources, and the Reference Desk the core of that service.

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*I*n this era of a constantly changing world - e.g., climate change, resource depletion, geopolitical conflict, pandemic disease, technological innovation, data hacks, social networking dependence - there is one issue that communities will need to address, one way or another, sooner or later, and they will need to do it mostly on their own. Local communities will need to find ways to facilitate interpersonal communication so that they can more effectively respond to changes in their immediate environment, that is, their sociopolitical, economic, and climate-related environments.

If improving communication in order to address change sounds like a good idea, why is there a need for communities to do it on their own? It is because state and federal governments, and large corporations, even relying on various technological innovations, won't be able to do many of the things that will need to be done on the local level.

Large-scale assistance is needed in times of major disasters when survival supplies and rescue machinery are needed, but when the first responders leave, it is the local people who come together to put lives back together again. Big services are just not designed to function very well when it comes to interfacing with the unique qualities and needs of local neighborhoods. In general, local self-reliance makes for better and more appropriate community responses and planning.

In more normal non-disaster times, it is local people who supply the basic resources and who represent the fabric of a community. We could substitute the word "network" for "fabric" and it would mean about the same thing: people connecting and interacting with other people. And many of the resources that are available are often provided by nonprofit organizations.

As a tool, the process of networking can be a powerful facilitator as well as a motivator, drawing people in and

keeping them coming back for more.

The benefit of, and the incentive for using, a community resource directory is that beyond improving pathways to the information a person needs, it can also reinforce and create direct interpersonal connections.

A directory listing allows everyone a view of what everyone, in nonprofits, is doing. The purpose of a directory should be to move people towards resources. But just as important, it should also create the potential for a wider pathway, one that can go in two directions so individuals see what organizations are doing, and organizations can see how other organizations are serving people's needs.

A directory is a quick view of much of what is available to everyone and a lesson in options that are available as well as those services that may be missing. Seeing that a resource is missing can be an incentive for someone to become inspired and take action to create something new.

This bi-directional communication doesn't just happen, people and organizations lead busy lives. They need a facilitator in order to promote action. This is where the public library and its reference functions come in - overseeing the directory. It is this ongoing interaction between libraries and nonprofits that helps create relationships and promotes the idea of avenues of connection: a continual interaction between providers and consumers.

Community planning and relationships

There's a lot of potential for change to occur in the future and one way or another, local communities reflect not only what is happening within their borders, but also what is happening in the larger world. And whatever affects a community, ultimately, individuals need to adjust.

This need to adjust can be an opportunity to create ways of bringing people closer together in supportive ways. Within this environment, it's how we share material resources (which may become increasingly scarce), how we make a living (relying on fewer employee benefits), how we can maintain a home (in a changing climate), and how we can help each other (including the aged and those with health challenges or fewer financial resources) that will represent critical challenges.

Group effort

There are people and programs working on these kinds of community-related issues. TransitionNetwork.org, a British invention, and TransitionUS.org, the American version, are designed to assist communities in adopting ways of managing large-scale changes that can impact people's lives. These are program ideas that suggest ways in which people can come together so they can share ideas that may be useful.

Several communities in the U.S. have taken advantage of this process and have produced some interesting results, for example: a local food conference in Boulder; a self-sufficiency skills program in Oklahoma City; a water conservation project, Tucson; a waste management program in Minneapolis. These programs function by creating a core local group of concerned citizens who then get together to work on whatever they think is important for their community. They often do this in a social way, sometimes using a block party or a pop-up store in order to raise spirits

and funds; Transition simply offers ideas and a structure.

It's a great idea, and there are other organizations offering a range of programs designed to assist local communities in addressing change. But like many great ideas, keeping a dedicated group going for the long run can be a difficult task. Individuals may be attracted to group efforts for many reasons, but if the sense of urgency wanes, or involvement becomes too tedious, other more personal priorities can pull people away. Group efforts can fade over time.

This is where community awareness comes in. It's like the old axiom, "what goes around, comes around." Information, whether beginning as a personal connection or group effort, circulates and has the potential to bring people together. And if it keeps circulating, it can continue connecting – if.

`Bringing nonprofits into the library`

Public libraries and nonprofit organizations already exist in villages, towns, and cities; there is no need to create something new when these resources already exist. One only need connect – network – these in order to enable a collective potential.

As the library becomes more familiar with the nonprofits serving their community and develops relationships with them, new joint efforts may suggest themselves. One example is holding an annual nonprofit festival at the library - that showcases unique programs or even provides healthcare or other needed services on the spot.

The following are just a few ways in which collaboration can work.

The annual nonprofit festival

There's nothing new about having a community festival, or setting up tables, or an information booth: outreach for services. Like a music or crafts fair, or an Earth Day festival, this festival would exhibit the nonprofit organizations that serve a community, and it would be presented by the local public library.

PRESENTED BY YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

MEET AND GREET COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

MEET THE VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE CREW

CHECK OUT THE ARTS PROGRAM

INVESTIGATE NATURE + ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

HEALTH + WELLNESS PROGRAMS
CHECK YOUR BLOOD PREASURE

ASK ABOUT GARDENS + PLANTINGS
THE GARDEN CLUB

PLAY A BOARD GAME WITH THE CHESS CLUB

THE DANCE TROUPE CAN TEACH YOU A NEW STEP

PRESENTING NONPROFIT ACTIVITIES + SERVICES

`Displays`

Libraries often have display areas offering brochures and pamphlets for various services and activities. Now just shift the focus: brand the display as a place to exhibit local nonprofit services and activities.

Chances are that material in existing displays already represents many nonprofit resources. By calling attention to nonprofits being local, the library is just rebranding it as community-based – a bit more personal and compelling.

Free meeting space for organizations

Bringing nonprofits into the library means doing just that. Many groups need a meeting space, and library spaces can be rented offering a source of income. But providing free meeting space to nonprofits can have longer term and deeper impacts for the library and its community.

- Meetings bring people into the library, perhaps exposing them to a new experience.
- The library can have greater impact on the social well-being of a community by more directly supporting local services and activities.
- "A home for the community" also opens up the possibility of the library sponsoring a nonprofit conference where organizations participate in discussion panels and take questions from the audience.

Nonprofit conference

"A home for the community" - the public library - opens up the possibility of the library sponsoring a nonprofit conference where organizations participate in discussion panels and take questions from the audience.

Nonprofit event board

Not a general bulletin board (although that's a great idea too), and not like the brochure stand, but a dedicated board for events sponsored by local nonprofit organizations. Again, if the library already has such a bulletin board, and many of the events are already sponsored by nonprofits, it's just a matter of rebranding.

Display tables & video

Nonprofit organizations can be treated the same way a library displays new book arrivals, displays of historical significance, art works. Organizations could create their own displays to illustrate and promote what they do.

Where's the life?

That's the question: At the end of the day, where is the library headed, and what kinds of things are people interested in?

Is the library utilizing their space in a way that promotes the kinds of things the community is already involved in, or promoting trends not necessarily related to life in their community?

Nonprofit collaboration

Engaging nonprofits with the local library is one form of collaboration; engaging nonprofits with other nonprofits is another. Motivation for nonprofit collaboration can be the enhancement of efficiencies through shared infrastructure, resources, or combined events.

Larger national organizations may have the financial and staff resources necessary to experiment with collaborations like combined programs that address complex issues. However, many nonprofits serve only local populations like villages, towns, or sections of larger cities. The need for, and ability to collaborate with smaller more locally based nonprofits, may not be as apparent as with the larger organizations, ones that have the resources to develop collaborations.

This may be where a "middle person" like the public library can offer a path forward.

Matchmaking

The seven lines on the following graphic illustration only show how one might go about investigating collaboration possibilities between nonprofits. The words in this matrix represent specific interests or functions of nonprofits.

Both columns have the same terms. The first linked words, *business startup* and *immigrant services,* indicate a potential for these organizations to collaborate - perhaps on a project that introduces small business ideas to new arrivals in the community. The others each suggest a possible relationship that might lead to a collaborative effort.

Nonprofit collaboration matrix

Column 1	Column 2
animal adoption	animal adoption
bicycle riding	bicycle riding
bird watching	bird watching
business startup	business startup
cancer support	cancer support
cooking	cooking
counseling	counseling
dance	dance
depression	depression
employment counseling	employment counseling
end of life	end of life
food bank free	food bank free
foster parent	foster parent
hiking	hiking
hobby	hobby
homeless help	homeless help
immigrant services	immigrant services
job-training	job-training
sculpting	sculpting
seniors services	seniors services
singing	singing
square dancing	square dancing
support groups	support groups
theater	theater
veterans assistance	veterans assistance
women business	women business
yoga	yoga
youth center	youth center

Community Dependence

The hope is that suggesting collaboration will cause a shift in perspective, inspiring an organic process that creates new interactions and more meaningful connections to the community.

Visibility of nonprofits through a library connection can offer increased access to nonprofits as well as to the library. And the greater the visibility of libraries, the more relevant they can appear. It's a reciprocal action: raising awareness attracts attention, which raises awareness and increases participation.

It is no longer just access to the book, journal, or film that needs to be centralized in a library; it is the interactions of residents within a flexible information and community-oriented environment. The public library is the one community space that is designed, built, and paid for specifically to bring people and information together.

The Future

The future of public libraries and nonprofits are linked to the future of communities, and the other way around.

$\mathcal{E}$xactly how communities will change in the future is impossible to know. Just as difficult is knowing how community life might change if we were to create new forms of interconnecting pathways and increase access to community resources. We do know that change of some sort is inevitable, and we could say that more access to resources is better than less access. But if we can't predict exactly the changes that are to come, how can we plan?

This kind of thinking misses something important: it is not what resources we need to plan for first, but what service-systems – networking - we need to put in place that will enable us to know what that plan should look like.

Everyone - living in isolation, or fully engaged in community life - has always faced the challenge of managing resources for the future. Nothing new about that. What is different in our current era is the rate of technological development, and the level of environmental impacts we humans are experiencing on many fronts: social, economic, climate, resource, etc..

As the future approaches, the responsibility for managing resources may fall harder on local communities. People working collaboratively to manage local resources effectively - or *resilience* if you prefer – offers a path that can direct us toward healthier outcomes.

Community Development
Two Basic Forms

Needs Driven*
Focused on addressing problems and deficiencies

Capacity-Focused*
Focused on utilization of existing skills and assets
to improve health of the community

*School of Education and Social Policy, DePaul University

Example:
In healthcare it's the difference between

focusing on treatments of disease

vs.

focusing on health to make disease less likely

And speaking of diseases...

I was thinking one day...

about the world and the many different challenges that are affecting us, and all those that might.

Challenges like:

Pandemic disease
Economy, trade, globalization
Climate change
Aging populations
Social isolation
AI, robotization
Resource depletion
And many others, some not as extreme...

How can society manage these challenges?
How can I?

Exactly!

Thinking realistically, and globally while acting locally:
How can we encourage healthy outcomes,
for today and into the future?
How do we promote sustainability and resiliency,
for ourselves and for our communities?

Helping communities to be sustainable really addresses many
things: business startups, affordable housing, pollution-free
environments, healthy safe food, healthcare, safe streets,
cultural activities, and much more.

Using existing resources to promote community health

Capacity-focused methods means managing challenges by relying on and enhancing existing skills and assets:

- Government Services - You know what these are
  - Businesses - You know what these are
    - Nonprofit services and activities
    How much do you know
about your community nonprofit resources?
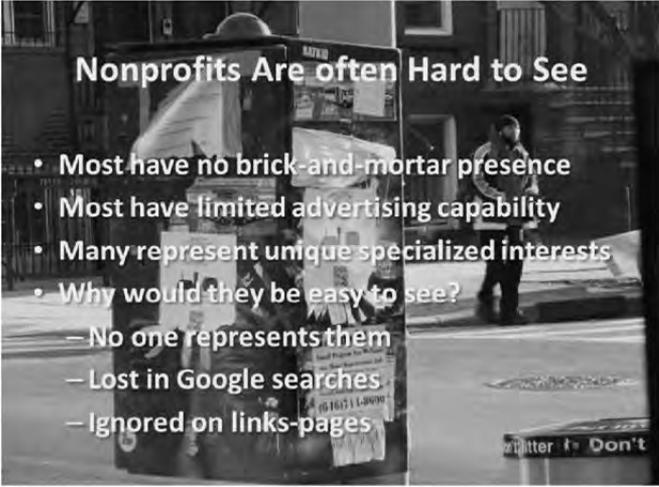
Nonprofits Are often Hard to See

- Most have no brick-and-mortar presence
- Most have limited advertising capability
- Many represent unique specialized interests
- Why would they be easy to see?
  - No one represents them
  - Lost in Google searches
  - Ignored on links-pages

Why are nonprofits important?

- Nonprofit resources represent a wide range of services and activities – e.g. volunteer fire departments, foodbanks, book clubs, health services, social clubs, legal aid, family planning, hikers, bikers, runners, birders, care givers...
- Nonprofit resources are already in place - they are self maintaining
- Existing nonprofits are already proven effective
- Nonprofits are often community residents, who interact with other local people – networking

Making nonprofit resources easier to see and access can contribute to community health

Library Community Network (LCN)

LCN's Three Components

Public Library
Local information-management service

Community
Nonprofit & government skills & assets

Network
Connections that promote interaction

LCN is assets-based management of nonprofit resources serving the local community.

LCN is a program and a directory

LCN goals:
- Increase local resource visibility
- Encourage community involvement
- Enable communication and interaction between the library, nonprofits, and the community
- Present the local public library as the community center for local resources

IMPORTANT: A directory is an excuse -

— To create and improve relationships with the people who represent nonprofits

— To offer more timely and personal connections to local people, their skills and assets

— To act as a pathway, connecting the community to nonprofits and to the local public library

Directory listings is a path through the community forest.

About This Project

Alan Pakaln is a retired clinical engineer who worked in New York City hospitals. Alan also writes about clinical safety issues (jointcommissionaccreditation.org), and community risk management (https://communityriskmanagement.org).

> The best way to offer this networking program would be through a collaborative effort between the American Library Association, and nonprofit representation such as the National Council of Nonprofits, and the Society of Nonprofits.

Do you know any librarians? Community development folks? People involved in promoting sustainable communities? A free pdf of this book can be obtained by contacting Alan through his website.

https://concernedconnections.org

Books by Alan Pakaln

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