

The Community Partnerships Toolkit

A “how to” on the president’s theme

by Julie Todaro

While many may agree that collaboration and partnerships between higher education environments and outside entities may be beneficial, not every institution has the commitment (at a variety of levels) nor the infrastructure to make initiatives work.

Although identifying and researching partnership benchmarks is part of establishing partnerships, it is by no means the only part of the process. “Going out and finding others” who have been successful does not guarantee a match between institutional and organizational goals, a similar commitment to process, nor comparable infrastructure. In fact, given the uniqueness of many colleges and universities, the broad diversity of communities, and the changing nature of business and organizations in the 21st century, it is reasonable to assume that only certain elements of many benchmarks would transfer and translate to other interested possible partners.

With these issues in mind, the members of ALA’s Committee on Information Literacy Partnerships began to work together to create a number of ways to identify, gather, and disseminate information on partnerships in general and information literacy partnerships.

While it is easy to offer programs and round up “the usual suspects” or those already committed to all or part of the process, the challenge was to offer information and process to as broad an arena of individuals as possible in as many formats as possible. Although future articles will focus in depth on specific partnerships, background reading, and national and regional programs, this article will focus on the Web-based Community Partnerships Toolkit that offers individuals both content and process.

As with any toolkit or “how to” information, there are a variety of ways to organize information for the greatest possible use and understanding. In observing the earliest working groups of ACRL’s Institute for Information Literacy (three years ago) and initial ALA programs, it became clear that when information literacy, information literacy partnerships, and especially those partnerships among different types of libraries arose for discussion, a pattern emerged—more questions than answers.

It is obvious that new information and ideas always bring questions, but where content and projects bring together seemingly disparate issues and beliefs, however, there

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The toolkit Web site.

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Given the realization that partnership issues were “out there” but in vastly different situations and for vastly different reasons, toolkit designers choose to create a Web environment that first answered general questions. Using the “frequently asked questions” or FAQ design, content designers also created questions and answers that peak curiosity, lead to the basic tools to learn about the benefits of partnerships, determine how partnerships might work for them, “observe” partnerships in general and in similar environments, and then determine if partnerships will work for them.

The nature of Web-based information and toolkits in general is a dynamic process, therefore those using the Community Partnerships Toolkit to investigate and design should also join the electronic list for ongoing announcements as well as revisit the site periodically to note changes or visit “New.”

Community partnerships toolkit

The toolkit now offers basic information on partnerships, partnership benefits, forming partnerships, links to partnerships (both content summaries and Web links), links to information literacy Web sites, basic definitions of issues, a description of a toolkit and how it can be used, scenarios to illustrate both process and success, links to basic background reading, feedback from participants at ALA programs and toolkit users, an introduction to assessment, and press releases on the initiative.

Specific FAQs include:

- What is information literacy?
- What is a toolkit?
- What are community partnerships?

- What are community partnerships for information literacy?

- How do we form community partnerships?

- How do we get partners involved?

- How do partnerships work?

- How do we know it is working?

- How does one advocate for information literacy?

- What are the benefits of

information literacy partnerships?

Future toolkit content

The New section of the toolkit outlines future wants and needs identified by the diverse audiences in partnership discussions to date. Specific plans call for updates in the areas of assessment techniques, assessment data/results of partnerships, sample budget information for a variety of partnership scenarios, additional scenarios indicating benefits of partnerships, scenarios of successes and failures, specific attention to consumer health/health issues partnerships, and benchmarking partnerships that have been formed based on this initiative (both successes and failures) including projects designed based on the toolkit. Content from ongoing ALA programs will be included in the toolkit, as well as publicity and marketing informa-

Attend Midwinter discussion

Besides future toolkit activities, a number of programs are being planned for ALA Midwinter 2001. To hear more about how academic libraries are collaborating with their communities, please join us at the 2001 ACRL President’s Discussion Forum “Building Communities @ Your Library” on Monday, January 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. in Washington D.C.

Hear more about the benefits of collaboration and partnerships in academic institutions and higher education, including benefits, creating the infrastructure, specific examples of partnerships, and how to collaborate without new funding.

tion librarians and community members can use locally.

In addition, ALA's newest public relations initiative @ Your Library will be incorporated into sample PR for partnerships as well as a strong advocacy piece based on ALA's Library Advocacy program, i.e., "How to advocate for information literacy partnerships in your institution and in your community."

Help identify partnerships

Although a growing number of institutions have placed their partnerships on the Web, many more have outstanding programs that need to be spotlighted.

Committee members need help in identifying what partnerships are out there, including those in the most rudimentary of planning stages, those farther along in the planning process, and those in progress. Send information to Julie Todaro (jtodaro@

austin.cc.tx.us) or Cerise Oberman (cerise.oberman@plattsburgh.edu).

Toolkit users could benefit from learning about the most basic to the most advanced partnerships as well as from the volume of partnership activity and interest. Toolkit designers will write summaries of existing partnerships and will link to content summaries of the partnerships with all types of libraries.

Toolkit address and location

The toolkit will be housed at <http://library.austin.cc.tx.us/staff/lnavarro/CommunityPartnerships/Toolkit.html> during the next academic year to provide committee members the greatest and fastest access. Future plans for 2002 include moving it to the ALA site to increase visibility. Currently it is linked to Nancy Kranich's ALA President's page and to the ACRL Information Literacy Institute pages. ■

Letters to the editor

Lone Ranger is not dead

I take friendly umbrage at your killing off the Lone Ranger in the library sector of the intellectual community ("The Lone Ranger is dead," by Betsy Wilson, *C&RL News*, September 2000).

Success demands collaboration? Collaboration is what put McDonald's between you and the local cuisine. Collaboration is what put your HMO between you and your doctor. Collaboration has put the Disney version between your child and significant literature. Collaboration is what reduces writers and scholars to the role of "content providers." Collaboration is what puts corporate values ahead of their effect on individuals.

There may be problems that require collaboration (read politics) for their solution, but unless there is an individual to have the problem, it may be pretty destructive to claim that there is one. Think of how the church can collaborate on the problem of idolatry among the natives.

OCLC may have required collaboration, but the books it helps you find that are worth reading after a few years in the catalog are hardly ever collaborative works. The books worth reading after 50 years in the catalog, the books that are worth their shelf space in other than

an archival sense, are the ones written by solitary individuals.

Literature, art, and, to a large extent, scholarship itself are created or conducted in existential solitude. A library that forgets the primacy of the individual in its endeavors deserves to be merged quietly into the corporate knowledge base.—*Tony Wilson, Highline Community College, Des Moines, Iowa, twilson@bcc.ctc.edu*

Ambiguity

I was pleased to see "The Lone Ranger is dead" essay in *C&RL News* and look forward to future installments. I'm trying to develop a more collaborative view of the world here at the DeVry Columbus Library, and it's great to know I'll have food for thought for the upcoming year!

Your quotation regarding "ambiguity" was especially pleasing. As I read it, I looked to my whiteboard, one-third of which had recently been covered with an all-caps "AMBIGUITY," and then to the wall above the whiteboard where a smaller, more decorative version of "Ambiguity!" now resides.

I've now fulfilled a mission of which I'd been unaware: seeing a bit of the world as you do.

Thanks for making my day!—*Bruce Weaver, DeVry Columbus Library bweaver@devrycols.edu*

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