

Use this tool to align your programs and strategies to your community's context.

Step 1: What do you know about your community?

Let's get a quick snapshot of your community. Fill in this chart as completely as you can.

Our Public Knowledge	What We Know
<p>What have you learned about the aspirations of people in your community, the challenges they see in getting there, and what's standing in the way of progress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Summarize your Public Knowledge from community conversations and/or the ASK tool, starting with people's Aspirations. <p>People want a safe community where they feel connected to and supported by others. They want all people to have access to opportunities to live a fulfilled life. They want a community that protects its natural resources and that values education. They also want a community where different generations interact with each other, and where everyone is valued and has a voice in decision making.</p> <p>But, they are concerned that people aren't connected. Many lack family support, and feel isolated. They also express concern about the lack of civility in society. These issues affect people's feelings of security. Educational and entertainment opportunities for children in some parts of the county are scarce, and economic opportunities for many working class families are limited. Many feel very stressed and exhausted just making ends meet. Specific examples of points of stress included low-paying jobs and expensive housing. It is perceived that the structures for community decision-making favor retirees and the wealthy. They want their voices to be heard.</p> <p>People say we need ways to help people connect to each other, gain access to community information and resources, and participate in community decision making.</p> <p>The groups or individuals trusted to take action on problems were peers, public servants such as police, teachers, and librarians, and some not-for profit groups and foundations.</p>

Community Rhythms

What is your Stage of Community Life? Catalytic

<p>How do you know?</p> <p>Look at the description of the stages to help answer this question.</p> <p>People feel disconnected from their peers, from people in other demographic groups, from leaders, and from decision making processes within the community.</p> <p>People want change, but feel that decision makers are listening to other people -- developers, the wealthy, retirees.</p> <p>There are some organizations that are providing opportunities for parents to connect. Organizations mentioned include Children First, Healthy Start, 40 Carrots, churches, and the libraries.</p>	<p>What should you do and not do at this stage?</p> <p>Use the Community Rhythms Do's and Don'ts Chart to help you answer this.</p> <p>We should not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate activities too quickly, stifling innovation and action. • Rush to visioning before the community is ready. • Do too much too fast. <p>We should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try lots of small things with room for failure, emphasize learning. • Build Boundary Spanning Organizations the can generate change. • Encourage informal conversations, networks and new engagement norms. • Develop a new cadre of leaders. • Tell authentic stories of progress over time. • Continue to encourage the involvement of all library staff to apply the listening, reflecting and reporting practices.
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Community Conditions

There are underlying conditions in the community that can get in the way of progress. You will learn about these from community conversations and in thinking about your Stage of Community Life. Use the chart to summarize what you know about community conditions.

Community Condition	How does this apply, and what are the specifics in our community?	How do we know?
Trusted Leaders How broad and deep is the leadership—at all levels of the community who understand the true concerns of the community as a whole, and who hold strong credibility and trust?	It is felt that access to community-wide leaders is easier for developers, the wealthy and retirees. Leadership within smaller groups???? Explore the neighborhood-level assets.	Some organizations in the community, such as Children First, provide a structure where their parents make decisions for the organization.
Community Norms for Public Life How strong and constructive are the community norms for public life—that help guide how people and organizations act individually, interact and work together?	There appears to be both informal and formal structures for interaction between organizations. Some are specific to a project and somewhat superficial. There are challenges with underlying “turf” issues that limit effective collaboration. Often when collaboration between agencies is under way, the perspective of those who may benefit from services or initiatives are not represented in a way that could best inform the decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have commented on a lack of civility in public settings (aggressive driving) • Comments were made that people don’t interact with others in communal settings (parents at children’s ball games who don’t talk to other parents, but spend their time on the phone)
Informal Networks and Links How broad and deep are the “informal networks and links”—that help guide how people and organizations act individually, interact and work together?	Informal networks are not strong or easily accessed. People expressed concern about being isolated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People noted that there is little interaction across generations, socio-economic groups, neighborhoods. • Comments were made that people don’t interact with others in communal settings (parents at children’s ball games who don’t talk to other parents, but spend their time on the phone) • People spoke about having little support in the community. • When we spoke to a specific group, however, people said they trusted others within that group. (homeschoolers, nursing mothers, college students)

Community Conditions (Continued)		
<p>Boundary Spanning Organizations How strong is the collection of boundary spanning organizations—those that help engage people in public life, spur discussion on community challenges and marshal a community’s resources to move ahead?</p>	<p>Sarasota County has structures that bring organizations together. These groups probably need to engage the community more in determining how they should move ahead. You often see the same players at meeting after meeting.</p>	<p>Boundary spanning orgs.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Foundations • A few of the community initiatives libraries participate in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grade Level Reading (Patterson) ○ End Summer Hunger (All Faiths Food Bank) ○ Talent 4 Tomorrow (Chamber of Commerce) ○ Coalition for Achieving Financial Empowerment (United Way)

Step 2: Look for “quick wins.”

Look at 2-3 of your current programs and strategies as a start. How can you use what you know about the community to make them more effective? Use this chart and make blank copies of it for additional programs and strategies.

<p>Current Program or Strategy</p>	<p>Prime Time: About 20 families who don't currently use the library are recruited to attend. A nice meal is provided for all the participants and for their entire family. Very young children are taken to the youth area for supervised play. Children ages 8 - 12 and their parents stay to hear a storyteller read two books which the families had been given the previous week. Following is a facilitated discussion about the book themes. This program is sometimes presented specifically for Spanish speakers.</p> <p>40 Carrots: Parenting educators lead a play group of 12 toddlers and their parents, providing strategies for effective parenting, providing developmental information, and providing free time for parents to ask questions and interact with other parents/children.</p> <p>Story time/Rhyme and Sign: Librarians lead these programs which utilize singing, dancing, puppets, reading, and crafts to promote early literacy and provide social interaction for children and their parents.</p>
<p>How will you change it? Be as specific as possible.</p>	<p>Determine how we can best engage some families to tell us what types of opportunities for interaction would match their desire for connections (ask general and then increasingly specific questions to get information and invite their involvement). Expand the number of these programs. Look at times offered (convenient for working parents?) Invite partners to assist to invite participation of their clients. Invite specific feedback from families to continue to inform us about their experiences.</p>
<p>Sweet Spot How does this better move the needle on the issue?</p> <p>And</p> <p>What community conditions will it address?</p>	<p>Our work will expand our public capital to better address the concerns about feeling isolated, not having support in the community, and not having a say in the community.</p> <p>The Community Conditions being addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing informal networks and links • The library will function as a boundary spanning organization, connecting parents with community resources to move the community forward. • Potential to identify other agencies or groups that already are or could in the future serve as boundary spanning organizations. • Continue to consider how existing networks and partnerships can go deeper.

Step 3: Look for new approaches

If you have already made changes to current programs; or have decided you want to develop new programs and strategies for your organization; or you are part of a partnership developing work together, use this chart to keep you focused on the community as you develop that work. Make blank copies of it for other programs and strategies.

<p>Potential New Initiative, Program or Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask parents if there are issues or topics that are of interest to them, or that they would like to learn about or discuss? • Invite families to activities (different formats?) that address these topics/interests • Take into consideration time and day of programs, child care and food • Invite organizations who could support the discussion to participate • Offer programs that address a concern of theirs, with time for discussion. • Provide space and resources for ongoing discussion/planning. • Look at groups currently meeting at the libraries, and consider if they might be interested in working with other groups on specific issues.
<p>How will this address what you have learned from the community? Use info on public knowledge from Step 1 to guide your answer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will give parents a vehicle to develop relationships with other parents. • It will provide some structure for people to discuss issues important to them. • It will potentially provide a mechanism for parents to develop leaders. • It will provide a way to include other organizations. • It will potentially provide a mechanism to relay ideas to others in the community.
<p>How do you know this approach fits with your Stage of Community Life? Use the info from Community Rhythms from Step 1 to guide your answer.</p>	<p>This approach is appropriate in the catalytic stage because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for small actions with room for failure, emphasizing learning • Encourages informal conversations, networks and new engagement norms • Allows for the development of boundary spanning organization
<p>Sweet Spot: What community conditions will it address?</p>	<p>Informal Networks and Links Boundary Spanning Organizations Community Norms for Public Life</p>