
DIMENSION III:

Inclusion-centered Leadership Practices in Building Community Partnerships Module



THEME 3

Developing Actionable Science Community Partnerships that Meet the Needs of Underserved Adults

Introduction

Developing and supporting partnerships with government and community organizations requires vision, time, and cultivation by you, library senior leadership, and staff. Just like your organization, potential partners will have their own agendas, expectations, and limitations in financial and staff resources. In the first instance, true partnerships must benefit all parties. Successful and sustainable partnerships will depend on your clarity of purpose, mutually defined roles and responsibilities, and regular, effective communication.

Tips for Successful Actionable Science Partnerships

Clarify your purpose

A clear purpose and shared understanding of partnership goals, activities, benefits, and expected outcomes is essential to a successful partnership.

Define roles, responsibilities, and work processes

There is a need to establish a mutual understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities, as well as a mutual recognition of the financial and time commitments to an ongoing partnership.

This understanding will address things like:

- Who will represent each organization?
- What role will the organization's directors play?
- Over the next year, what will we work on together, and what resources will be needed?

Communicate

Clear and regular communication among representatives of each organization is essential. Good communication recognizes the role of each partner. It provides opportunities to discuss and resolve challenges as they arise.

Create win-win situations

It's important to identify your library's interests to improve service to underserved adults, and to describe the potential benefits when you propose a partnership. Potential partners will be doing the same thing. Know that leading with *how the collaboration will benefit the partner* will resonate more with them—and generate more buy-in—than leading with how it will benefit the library.

Partnerships are most successful when they are mutually beneficial. The more you are able to describe how the partnership will create a win-win situation, the more potential partners will be interested in building a relationship with your library.

Assess and reassess your partnerships

Like all relationships, partnerships can be nurtured, evaluated, and improved. Working with partners on periodic assessments can help sustain trust, build respect, and address any possible issues. These conversations can also help you understand how to deepen the relationship in meaningful ways.

Build momentum

It's OK to start small. When your staff and community see tangible results of small, successful endeavors, their enthusiasm can help build momentum. Initial successes can also create opportunities for you to deepen your collaborations or invite new partners to participate and accomplish even more.

Community Partnerships that Benefit Underserved Adult Learners: A Step-by-step Guide

Developing partnerships to improve library programs and services for underserved adults seeking actionable science information requires careful consideration of several factors.

Firstly, defining the type of partnership you want to establish is crucial. This could involve collaborating with local science institutions, universities, community organizations, or science initiatives to co-create programs, share resources, or deliver joint services.

Secondly, it's essential to assess your library's internal skills, abilities, goals, and values, as well as the resources available to devote to the partnership. This includes evaluating staff expertise, assessing available funding or grants, and identifying any potential barriers or challenges that may need to be addressed.

Thirdly, the commitment of library leadership and staff is critical for success. This commitment involves dedicating time, resources, and effort to support partnership activities, engage with the audience, and ensure the sustainability of programs and services over the long term.

In successful partnerships, the benefits often significantly outweigh the effort invested, both in tangible outcomes such as increased access to resources and enhanced program offerings, as well as intangible benefits like strengthened community relationships and expanded networks of support. By following a structured approach and leveraging the expertise and resources of partner

organizations, libraries can maximize the impact of their programs and services for underserved adults seeking actionable science information.

STEP 1

Think partnership, not program

Potential partners will need to understand the library’s motivations for a partnership that delivers actionable science information to underserved adults. It is important to be honest about the qualities of the partnership you want to create and why.

Transformative partnerships serve as catalysts for positive change within communities, empowering libraries to extend their reach and impact as influential community leaders. Libraries have demonstrated that they can leverage collective resources and expertise

to address pressing social, educational, and economic challenges. These partnerships facilitate the development and implementation of innovative programs and initiatives that directly benefit residents, fostering a sense of inclusivity, empowerment, and well-being. From providing access to essential services and resources to organizing educational workshops and cultural events, transformative partnerships contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities where individuals thrive, and collective aspirations are realized.

By focusing on the holistic betterment of the community rather than solely on institutional gains, libraries can cultivate meaningful relationships and establish themselves as indispensable pillars of community development and enrichment.

Characteristics of Sustainable Partnerships	
A partnership IS NOT sustainable when...	A partnership IS sustainable when...
It only benefits one of the partnering organizations.	It’s a win-win for all organizations involved.
A lack of trust and respect negatively impacts the partnership by creating uncertainty. Lack of reliability and transparency limits the potential of shared programs.	Mutual trust and respect allow the individuals and organizations to take risks, express intellectual curiosity, experiment, and share lessons learned as well as give/take constructive criticism.
One partner pays for or donates products or services to the other without reciprocity.	Each organization contributes staff and financial resources to the partnerships in order to create something together.
There is a lack of recognition of the partnerships. This undermines sustainability, limits the overall value of the initiative to the community, and weakens the relationship.	There is communication about the partnership. Partnerships share data, lessons learned, and best practices with as broad a network as possible. The partnership is promoted, not kept secret. An open, public partnership allows others in the community to join the effort, bringing additional resources, learning from the partnership, and even adopting what has been developed.
The library is thinking program, not partnership.	The library is thinking partnership, not program. The value of shared accomplishments is greater than what each partner could have achieved individually.

Partnership characteristics and behaviors

A successful partnership will exhibit the following shared characteristics and behaviors.

Aspirations

Partners share a common definition of their aspirations related to an issue or topic of interest to the partners and the community.

Intentionality

Partners have a clear understanding of each organization's motivations and goals, as well as the commitment of each organization's leadership.

Authenticity

The partnership is based on sincerity, passion, and a shared belief in the value of the relationship and the importance of the issue you work on together.

Accountability

Partners are committed to pursuing meaningful issues, setting realistic expectations for change, making progress, and keeping promises as they follow through on responsibilities.

Learning

Partners share information and learn from one another. Both learn and grow as they build their vision, visualize end goals, define the “win-win” relationship, and experience the value of the partnership in the short and long term.

Engagement

As partners explore opportunities together, they may engage in a variety of ways: one-on-one, as part of a network of organizations with similar missions or interests, and/or in a dialog with multiple organizations and the community about issues of importance to all.

Shared vision and benefits of partnership

The rewards of partnership can be profound. Along with a discussion of your shared vision, it is important to discuss potential benefits from the viewpoint of each partner, so both of you will understand the other's motivations and see what success will look like from your partner's perspective.

Capacity building

A partnership can increase both the short- and long-term capacity of each organization. New organizational capacities and individual capabilities can take different forms, including increased library programming related to issues impacting underserved adults, organizational network development, and staff professional development (building knowledge, practicing outreach, developing communication skills, etc.).

New funding opportunities

A partnership can increase access to potential funding and in-kind services and support. Donors, foundations, and other sources of charitable giving will be looking at the quality of a collaboration when they consider supporting a program. Funders may prefer to support a strong partnership rather than a new and possibly redundant program that can seem fragmented or competitive.

Stronger networks and public support

In your community, a strong partnership can build grassroots connections, increase credibility, and generate positive public perceptions. Your library may earn a new “seat at the table” in key community meetings, and greater visibility can increase awareness of your interest in addressing pressing local issues.

Positioning of the library as a local leader

A successful partnership can begin to position your library as a hub for learning in the community. The library's role as a community hub is one of the primary assets the library can bring to a partnership, while partners bring specialized resources, expertise, and knowledge. Over time, community leaders and members—as well as potential new partners—can begin to see your library as an ideal venue for programs, and library staff as strong allies in the scientific community's efforts to get needed resources and information to the public.

STEP 2**Identify potential partners**

What are potential partners thinking? Potential partners are a lot like public libraries. They too operate with similar constraints, limited money, small staffs, and big goals. More than likely, they will come back to you with a cautious response because of constraints, along with a win-win requirement and an overall determination of whether the partnership will succeed or not. They too will have strong expectations and goals for a partnership.

There are a number of questions you should consider before meeting with potential partners. Examples include:

- Will the partnership be able to achieve its immediate goals?
- Does each partner have the same definition of success? How will success be evaluated and measured?
- Will the partnership support the mission or increase the credibility of each organization?
- What is truly gained by this relationship? Will the results of the partnership represent the best way to use the limited time and resources of both organizations?

Partnership logistics

Preparing to engage in an actionable science partnership can involve the following:

Outreach

You can start conversations with potential partners by reaching out via phone or email, or through a mutual friend or colleague. Partnership opportunities can begin at any level of the library, or they can be initiated by the other organization. Based on your confidence level, the time available, and understanding of the organizations you've identified, you may choose to meet with potential partners individually or to bring a number of organizations together to discuss goals and opportunities. Remember, the important thing is the quality of partnerships, not the quantity.

Because partnerships mean commitment of staff time and resources, it will be important for the decision-makers in both organizations to be directly involved in the formation of the partnership from the beginning.

Prepare for success

Whether you meet with potential partners one-on-one or as a group, it is critical to prepare for the meeting and define what will make it successful. Be careful not to focus on how the library can benefit; rather, focus on what you can accomplish together to work with underserved adults in your community. The first meeting is about getting to know each other and identifying common values and visions. If you can accomplish this up front, you'll be laying the foundation for a solid partnership.

Follow up

Strong partnerships begin and end with communication and mutual respect. Establish a channel for communication so you can share timetables and information, define roles and responsibilities, and discuss how decisions will be made together. Open communication will lend clarity to the partnership and build understanding and trust. Meet on a regular basis. Promptly share any notes and documentation of decisions and actions. And follow through on your commitments.

Inclusion-centered actionable science community partnerships: What are they?

The primary goal of inclusion-centered actionable science community partnerships with public libraries is to ensure that all voices are heard, valued, and represented in decision-making processes, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, or socioeconomic status. They actively seek to identify and address systemic barriers to participation and access, fostering environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to all community members. By fostering

collaboration, dialogue, and collective action, inclusion-centered community partnerships can create more resilient, equitable, and thriving communities for all.

Libraries can develop actionable science community partnerships that meet the needs of underserved adults and that serve the interests of the libraries.

Examples include:

Addressing Disparities

Underserved adults are disproportionately affected by health, environmental, and social disparities that have scientific underpinnings. Actionable science partnerships can help libraries address these disparities by providing targeted information, resources, and support services that empower underserved adults to make informed decisions and take action to improve their well-being and quality of life.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Actionable science partnerships engage underserved adults as active participants in the scientific process, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. By involving underserved communities' libraries can amplify their voices, build capacity, and promote community-driven solutions to pressing issue.

Educational Opportunities

Actionable science partnerships provide underserved adults with opportunities for lifelong learning, skill development, and personal enrichment. By offering science-based programs, workshops, and activities tailored to the needs and interests of underserved populations, libraries can promote science information literacy, critical thinking, and empowerment, opening doors to new opportunities and pathways for advancement.

Health and Well-being

Many underserved adults face health challenges and environmental risks that can be addressed through actionable science partnerships. Libraries can collaborate with health agencies, environmental organizations, and community partners to provide access to information, resources, and support services that promote preventive health practices, environmental stewardship, and resilience in underserved communities.

Equity and Inclusion

Underserved adults often face barriers to accessing scientific information, resources, and opportunities. By developing partnerships that prioritize the needs of underserved populations, libraries can promote equity and inclusion in science education, research, and engagement, ensuring that all community members have equal access to information and resources.

Inclusion-centered community partnerships are collaborative initiatives that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion to address actionable science community needs. These partnerships can bring together an array of organizations, government agencies, businesses, and residents to work collectively towards issues affecting community members, particularly those that are disproportionately affected.

Types of Inclusion-centered Actionable Science Community Partnerships

Health Literacy

Libraries can collaborate with healthcare providers and community organizations to provide actionable information on preventive care, chronic disease management, and navigating healthcare systems. Together they can address health disparities, address disease outbreaks, conduct vaccination campaigns, support smoking cessation programs, and promote healthy behaviors.

Citizen Science Projects

By collaborating with scientific institutions, libraries can facilitate citizen science projects that engage community members in addressing issues that are affecting their lives. For example, they can collect data on local biodiversity, air quality, flood risks, or water pollution. They might work with researchers to investigate the impact of pollution on public health, and develop strategies to reduce exposure and improve community well-being. Projects, such as monitoring wildlife populations, tracking climate change indicators, or mapping environmental hazards, empower underserved adults to participate in actionable science and address issues important to them.

Disaster Preparedness

Libraries can partner with emergency management agencies, first responders, and disaster relief organizations to address health disparities, prevent disease outbreaks, and promote healthy behaviors. Together, they can provide training sessions, workshops, and informational resources on disaster preparedness, evacuation procedures, and emergency response strategies that address the impact of natural disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires, or floods.

Digital Inclusion Programs

Teaming up with technology companies and community centers, libraries can offer digital literacy training, computer access, and internet connectivity programs to bridge the digital divide and empower underserved populations to access online resources and opportunities.

Financial Literacy

Collaborating with financial institutions and non-profit organizations, libraries can assist underserved adults with

budgeting, saving, investing, and debt management to promote financial literacy and economic empowerment.

Mental Health Awareness

Libraries can collaborate with mental health professionals and support groups on mental health awareness, coping strategies, and accessing mental health resources and services in the community.

Environmental Conservation and Restoration

Libraries can collaborate with conservation organizations, environmental agencies, and local experts to provide actionable science services to underserved adults that protect biodiversity, preserve ecosystems, restore habitats, and mitigate the effects of climate change. Together they can promote environmental resilience and stewardship.

Other Immediate Actionable Science Issues

Food insecurity; drug addiction and overdosing; Alzheimer patient-caregiver information, support and services.

STEP 3

Implement a partnership

Implementing a partnership involves translating shared goals and strategies into tangible actions and outcomes that benefit both the library and its collaborators. Libraries can start by establishing clear timelines, milestones, and performance indicators to track progress and ensure accountability. Effective communication and coordination are crucial throughout the implementation process, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and feedback. Regular meetings, workshops, and collaborative planning sessions enable partners to address challenges, refine strategies, and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Additionally, libraries can leverage existing platforms and networks to promote partnership activities and engage the broader community in their initiatives. By fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement, libraries can realize the full potential of their partnerships, and create lasting positive change within their communities.

STEP 4

Partnership assessment and recognition

The need to be completely honest about all aspects of the partnership begins the moment you reach out to potential partners. Partnerships are about the cultivation and management of relationships. Make recognition and reflection are part of every interaction. This kind of communication allows you and your partners to keep moving forward, knowing where you stand, and where you are going together. Within the context of a meeting, the leader can encourage conversations of assessment and recognition.

Definitions and measures of success

How will you know if your partnership is successful for your community? Examples of ways to view success include:

Meaningful connections are made.

Your partnership connects your community with ideas and experiences that are engaging and meaningful.

Relevant issues are addressed.

The activities conducted through the partnership reflect the community's needs and interests in intentional ways.

Momentum builds.

The community can see tangible results of the partnership's initial endeavors, and that enthusiasm builds momentum. You and your partners have new opportunities to deepen collaborations, include new partners, and accomplish more.

Partnership effectiveness is measurable.

To measure your success, you'll need to look at specific indicators. It is important, that all partners want to evaluate the success of the partnership as well as the program outcomes. This review allows for better communication, transparency, and enhances program and services. The definition and level of success will be unique to each partnership.

As with project evaluation, defining success starts at the beginning of the partnership with identified activities and outcomes. The *Partnership Effectiveness Table* below is modified from Cheryl L. King's *Partnership Effectiveness Continuum: A Research-Based Tool for Use in Developing, Assessing, and Improving Partnerships*. This self-assessment is designed to provide clear descriptions of indicators that can be assessed, helping you develop and maintain effective partnerships. A downloadable version is online at www.stemlibraries.org.

Measuring Partnership Effectiveness		
Indicators	Criteria	Range from highly effective to ineffective
Mission and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared mission and set of beliefs serve as guides for the work of the partnership. • Collaboration among partner organizations is characterized by trust, mutual respect, and effective interaction. 	
Shared goals for partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are clear and measurable • Address common needs • Are mutually beneficial 	
Shared leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share accountability for achieving partnership goals • Share decision-making • Participate in meetings 	
Agendas and logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jointly created and supported • Pursue priorities that accomplish short-term objectives • Are resourced (e.g., time, people, budget) 	
Action plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate specific actions • Provide timelines, roles, and responsibilities 	
Progress measures and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance measures assess progress • Data is used to assess partnership effectiveness. 	

WORKSHEET 3

Community Partnership Evaluation

Objectives

- To identify and evaluate potential partners for collaboration on library programs and initiatives that provide actionable science information to underserved adults
- To develop productive, transformative partnerships
- To recognize that in partnerships, the community comes first, and then the library
- To choose partnerships that build relationships and expand each other's organizational capacities and community awareness.

What You Need

- Completed *Worksheet #3: Setting an Inclusion-centered Library Goal and Action Plan* found on pages 32-34 in the *Serving Communities: Dimension II – Inclusion-centered Leadership Practices in Library Organizational Culture Module* (optional but recommended)
- An identified actionable science issue your library is interested in engaging underserved adult learners around
- A list of community organizations that provide support and services around the identified actionable science issue and/or directly work with the underserved community members your library is interested in engaging and serving

Time

4 to 8 hours (**NOTE:** depending on the level of clarity you and your library have about the actionable science issue you want to address and the underserved community member group you want to serve.)

Discover

The *Community Partnership Evaluation Worksheet* is designed to help you take a deeper dive on how to determine transformative partnerships that are successful, sustainable, and able to provide expanded meaningful support to community members around actionable science issues that matter them. This worksheet will also help you identify the types of resources and commitments to the partnership and will be important information for any potential partner.

Instructions

STEP 1

Review the Community Partnership Evaluation

Worksheet (see page 30) to determine the types of information you need when evaluating potential community partners.

STEP 2

Determine Library Direction

Take some time to either review the completed *Worksheet 3: Setting an Inclusion-centered Library Goal and Action Plan* found on pages 32-34 in the *Serving Communities: Dimension II – Inclusion-centered Leadership Practices in Library Organizational Culture Module*, or begin to consider ways you can broaden the participation of underserved adult learners in an existing library program and/or service.

STEP 3

Reflect on What Makes You and Your Library a Good Partner

Looking at the *Community Partnership Evaluation Worksheet*, complete Column 3: What does your library bring to the partnership? What are the pros, cons, partnership criteria and overall level of good fit of your library to the community organization?

STEP 4

Visualize Success

Now complete Column 4: Collectively, what are the definitions of success for the library, partners and community member groups? This will be very helpful in identifying the partnership criteria most important to you, the ability to broaden participation, and what the library brings to the partnership.

STEP 5

Create a Community Partnership List That Aligns with Your Vision of Success.

Start by doing a web search of the community partners who are focused on the identified actionable science issue and the underserved community member group you would like to engage with. Create a short list of the top three (3) community partners, and highlight your overall considerations and reasons for partnering with them now.

STEP 6

Meet-and-Greet

Your first meeting with community partners should be focused on:

1. simply getting to know each other;
2. your interest in learning more from them on actionable science issues affecting community member groups;
3. possible areas community partners believe the library can provide support and/or services; and
4. possible areas of collaboration.

Your first meeting's goal and agenda are comprised of two parts:

PART 1

Learn About Each Other's Organizations, who they serve, how they serve and why. This meeting is also for the community partner(s) to understand the functions and roles of the library.

PART 2

Explore Partnership Possibilities.

Provide a one-page overview on an actionable science issue, who you would like to engage, and why. It will be important to make the overview about the issue and community members first, and not about the library. The overview will be beneficial to you as a succinct, clear set of talking points and for the representatives from the community organization to quickly understand what you want to accomplish and to visualize if they have the same goal. Expect that this document will change during and after the meeting.

It is important to try and keep trying. It is very likely that you will need to talk with multiple community organizations as partnerships are about shared goals and all parties benefiting from the collaboration.

A good example of a program/service that could be broadened is that many libraries provide librarian support to help users navigate online health websites like National Institutes of Health Medline, the Mayo Clinic, or WebMD.



Building Community Partnership Table

Organization your library is interested in building a partnership with:			
Possible actionable science theme of interest to the library and prospective organization:			
Top three (3) organizations your library is interested in collaborating with	What are the pros, cons, partnership criteria, and overall level of good fit with library?	What does your library bring to the partnership? What are the pros, cons, partnership criteria, and overall level of good fit of library to the organization?	Collectively, what are the definitions of success for the library, partners, and underserved audience?
Name of Community Organization 1	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with your library: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (expertise, facilitate introductions, other community supports):	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with partner: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (e.g., meeting space):	Community member group: Community organization: Your library: Ability to address needs: Commitment of resources Collectively: Roles/responsibilities:
Name of Community Organization 2	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with your library: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (expertise, facilitate introductions, other community supports):	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with partner: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (e.g., meeting space):	Community member group: Community organization: Your library: Ability to address needs: Commitment of resources Collectively: Roles/responsibilities:
Name of Community Organization 3	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with your library: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (expertise, facilitate intros, other community supports):	Pros: Cons: Key partnership criteria: Overall fit with partner: Commitment of resources Financial: Staff: Other (e.g., meeting space):	Community member group: Community organization: Your library: Ability to address needs: Commitment of resources Collectively: Roles/responsibilities:
Overall Considerations			

Reflect

Ask yourself and your team:

1. What do they think of the possible Action Plan?

2. Who should we speak with about unintended consequences?

3. Who are the key partners or groups?

4. What is the best way to proceed with the action plan?

Act

Action 1: Commit the time and resources to make the action plan succeed.

