



LIBRARIES
Lead the way

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND FACILITATION SKILLS TRAINING



CommonKnowledge

**YEAR-END
REPORT**
FALL 2017

“...a lot of progress was made on coming together as a community and working toward common goals.”

New skills, new relationships

As the role of libraries continues to evolve, community engagement and facilitation skills are increasingly vital



Libraries Lead the Way seeks to empower library staff with the skills to engage members of their community, build stronger relationships with local partners and facilitate meaningful community conversations. The project-based training was developed in response to requests by libraries in the NorthNet and Pacific Library Partnership library systems. It is part of a larger movement in which libraries are more proactively engaging their communities to adapt their services to changing social networks, as well as digital networks.



The Libraries Lead the Way program has been coordinated by Jacquie Brinkley, NLS System Coordinator. Training has been provided by Common Knowledge Group (www.ckgroup.org), an expert in nonpartisan community engagement and civic education. The training was also made possible in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.



Training Overview

Libraries Lead the Way brought together two training cohorts from throughout Northern California. Eleven libraries applied to participate in one of two in-person trainings that were held Sept. 27-28 in Redding, CA, and Oct. 26-27 in Fairfield, CA. Each training featured:

- A comprehensive interactive training manual that walks participants through a five-step process, providing key concepts, planning worksheets, step-by-step templates and easily shared tools and tips
- A format structured to exchange ideas, share experiences and reflect on lessons learned
- Multiple chances to practice facilitation and new ways of listening in large- and small-group settings
- Practice managing a conversation and role-playing to redirect different kinds of challenging participants
- The chance to participate in an evening community gathering, offering a real-world application of skills, followed by a thorough debrief the next morning
- Time for teams from each library to plan their own projects and choose their next steps for applying the training



Following the in-person trainings, the LSTA grant also allowed for limited follow-up coaching support from the team at Common Knowledge for participating libraries. Members of both training cohorts also received a post-training newsletter and participated in a January 2017 winter webinar to share each team's project progress and reflect on what they were learning. The end of project survey indicated that the most valued elements of the training were the evening community conversation, the training manual and the peer-to-peer exchange.



TRAINING SPOTLIGHT

Evening community conversation provides real-world practice

One of the training's most unique and popular features was the evening community conversation. After spending an entire day talking about and practicing community engagement and facilitation skills with fellow librarians, participants were given the chance to apply what they had learned with local community members.

Offering this opportunity required coordinating far ahead of time with the local library hosts. During the September training, the Shasta Public Libraries convened a conversation about support for children and families in the Redding community. During the October training, the Solano County Library convened a conversation about types of literacy supports needed in their community. During each conversation, members of the Libraries Lead the Way training cohorts served as greeters, note takers and table facilitators.



Being able to participate in a real community conversation during the in-person portion of the training was consistently mentioned as LLTW's most beneficial feature. The evening community conversations helped reduce facilitation anxiety and gave participants a sense that they could do something similar on their own. "It's not as difficult or scary as it seems," said one participant in the training's summative survey. "We learned that it really takes the hands-on experience," said another participant.

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I personally learned that this kind of outreach and participatory conversation is possible and I'm not totally sure I felt that way before.

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“

We were given a blueprint to effectively discuss hot button issues/topics within a community that does not alienate, allows the library to get anecdotal data and real-time feedback. LLTW provided a roadmap to show how the library can play a role in community building.

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Team Progress

Over the course of the Libraries Lead the Way training, participating libraries applied their learning in a wide range of ways.

Library teams have used the training to:

- Engage patrons more meaningfully in daily interactions
- Plan and execute participatory staff meetings
- Engage the community through meaningful conversations
- Improve relationships and coordination with other agencies
- Build relationships with a wide range of community partners

TEAM PROFILE

Increased staff capacity, increased engagement

Team: Solano County Library

After hosting a highly successful community conversation during the October Libraries Lead the Way training, Solano's team has been off and running. They report that the conversation on literacy has changed the way their team thinks about its adult literacy offerings, with a shift to being more student-centered.

They built collaborative relationships with local partners and trained a student literacy ambassador to serve as a student on staff. Additionally, team members are planning four



internal conversations and two external community conversations on issues of race and systemic inequity. Based on their increasing skills, Solano's team was also tapped by their library's leadership to help facilitate conversations about the library's strategic plan.

TEAM PROFILE

Engaging community members countywide

Team: Sonoma County Library

Following the successful passage of a library bond measure, Sonoma County Library faced questions about how best to use the new funding. To get residents' input on library hours, services and programming, the team used the community mapping tools from the training in launching an ambitious outreach program. Over the course of several weeks, the library hosted well-attended community



TEAM SPOTLIGHT

Responding to community needs in Yolo County

When their original plan to hold a conversation on housing changed direction, the team from **Yolo County Library** quickly shifted to another relevant topic: supporting teens. Following the national election in November 2016, teens attending the Winters branch confided in a librarian that they have encountered hostile comments at school about “packing their bags” and “moving back to Mexico.”

Working with local partners, the library brought together a group of students for a conversation on “How do we create a safe community for all teens in Winters?” The conversation was very well received and has served as inspiration for additional conversations. The library continues to be a leader when it comes to engaging residents and building strong community partnerships.

“Outreach was not a huge function of libraries in the past,” said Crista Cannariato, West Yolo Regional Supervisor. “Now it’s part and parcel to what we do.”

conversations at 12 of the county’s libraries branches, gathering significant data about the needs of patrons and their communities. The team also developed paper and online surveys to complement community conversations and reach patrons who could not attend meetings in person. The Sonoma team is currently planning a participatory training for all library staff members and looking at convening additional conversations in the community.

TEAM PROFILE

Enhancing Harwood community conversations

Team: Napa County Library

In addition to participating in Libraries Lead the Way, the team from Napa has been hard at work implementing the Harwood Public Innovators Lab for Public Libraries training. The team has held 15 conversations and partnered with the county Department of Health & Human Services to gather comments for their Healthy Napa County community health assessment.

Libraries Lead the Way helped clarify staff needs for facilitation support and provided a strategy the library could use. To help apprehensive staff, the library director also organized a series of “model” conversations. These conversations allowed staff to observe and debrief the meeting experience before taking on a more prominent facilitation role. Staff members reported feeling much more confident and comfortable after going through this process.

“...you can learn a lot by asking community.”

LLTW TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Engaging community, planning participatory staff meetings

- After initially discussing an external conversation about technology, **Siskiyou County Library** staff recognized the need to first improve coordination and services between their branches. Over the course of two conversations, the library team brought together staff from 12 branches to talk about the library service model. The library is working to implement multiple recommendations identified by staff ahead of a broader community conversation series later this year.
- **Tehama County Library** has been strengthening partnerships in its community and helping to bridge local political divisions. The library held a holiday community event to build support for its new library in Red Bluff and encourage positive dialogue in their community. The library has also developed partnerships with Shasta College, to offer ESL classes to Red Bluff residents, and with the Tehama County Department of Education, to offer a series of technology classes for parents.
- **San Rafael Public Library** used the training internally to plan participatory staff meetings and externally to plan conversations with school partners and education stakeholders. The library will be conducting further outreach and education efforts next year as it prepares to launch a communitywide library card initiative.
- **Alameda County Library's** San Lorenzo branch has done exemplary work reaching out to new partners and stakeholders in their community. They have built relationships with key neighborhood organizations and engaged residents directly by going to local housing complexes. The larger library system has been equally active, conducting outreach at several events and community celebrations.
- **Butte County Library** has used the training during a children's staff meeting and a meeting of the library's publicity team. Team members plan to hold additional community events and to continue practicing their facilitation skills during staff meetings.
- **Shasta Public Libraries** used the training internally to collaboratively plan their staff day. They held small-group conversations with roughly 24 library staff members, responding to questions such as, "What did you like or dislike about previous staff days?" and "What do you want to get out of the coming staff day?" Staff members also helped select the most popular ideas.
- **Lincoln Public Library** plans to bring together a diverse group of partners and community members for an upcoming conversation about how to support teens. The library is working closely with their local school district and several other community partners.

Training Outcomes

Libraries Lead the Way proved to be a highly relevant and popular training. Qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants was both overwhelmingly positive. The training earned particularly high marks for its evening community conversation and comprehensive approach – taking participants through the entire planning and execution of a community conversation. Several participants also highlighted the training’s complementary value to the Harwood training. According to one librarian who participated in the Harwood training, Libraries Lead the Way’s evening conversation proved to be “an invaluable experience.” “It’s why we’ve been as successful as we’ve been [with Harwood],” she said.

Most participants indicated that they had “some” or “limited” facilitation experience prior to the training. In the summative survey, 100% of respondents reported feeling more confident when it comes to facilitating a staff meeting and convening a community conversation.

Participants also overwhelmingly reported gains in community engagement:

- Better understanding of community engagement fundamentals (94%)
- More confident reaching out to diverse community organizations (94%)

Recommendations for Future Trainings

- Support from library leadership emerged as a significant factor affecting implementation. In most cases, libraries had the greatest gains when senior management was actively involved in supporting the team and their project. Future trainings could more explicitly engage directors or managers earlier in the application phase and initial project development.



- Some teams also felt that they needed more support picking a project topic prior to attending the training. A planning phone call or in-person planning session would be ideal. One opportunity would be to hold an introductory planning workshop at a regional or state convention.
- Team member composition was also important. Some teams struggled to find time to meet or collaborate regularly. Having team members all at the same library branch or working in the same department was mentioned as a way to increase success and reduce communication challenges.

For more information visit

<http://northnetlibs.org/libraries-lead-the-way/> or contact NLS

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“Community engagement is easier than I thought.”