



Anchorage 21st Century Library Community Plan

Multi-Ethnic Young Professionals Focus Group

Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Location: Z.J. Loussac Library Public Conference Room in the Assembly Chambers

Participants: 9 young professionals

MAJOR THEMES:

- Participants believed that Anchorage's ethnic diversity is an asset that is underutilized and underleveraged by the Library
- There is the perception of a lack of true community gathering spaces where it is "okay" to approach and meet new people
- There is a lack of free/low cost activities for families with children on the weekends
- There is a need for our public spaces to update the technology available for use and to update the technology used to communicate their offerings
- Libraries need to look at the community center model in "re-imagining" themselves and create consistent "magnets" that match real unmet community needs
- Barriers (both monetary & regulations) in accessing, renting and using the spaces in our libraries need to be removed
- Participants have a perception that the library is not a dynamic place anymore and has no active engagement with diverse ethnic groups
- Major everyday uses of technology identified by this group are cell phone and laptop (text messages and email)
- The library needs to prioritize having staff in the community and staff to build, nurture and maintain community partnerships

WELCOME + INTRODUCTIONS

Positive aspects about Anchorage:

- Alaska Native community is getting bigger
- Many up-and-coming young leaders
- Ethnically diverse population
- A lot of people that want to make a difference in the community
- Lots of micro-movements co-occurring which is giving birth to lots of new young leaders
- A lot of different groups trying to do things by collaborating or partnering to reach our youth
- Ethnically diverse, you easily run into people who look like you around town
- Positive environment for young people to grow and learn about each other's communities and the opportunities available through the Anchorage School District
- The programs and organizations available in the community

Things that would make living in Anchorage better:

- More integration of the ethnic diversity (specifically for Alaska Natives) into everything, from the business sector, to politics, etc. Moving beyond culture.
- Not a lot of avenues to easily meet new people – we need to create more
- More community events
- Better access to spaces (low cost/free/with technology) to host and organize events and better public transportation (access + affordable) so that ethnically diverse communities and youth can easily attend the events
- Micro-movements (social networks) revolve around the business community/districts and need to connect back to local communities (Fairview, Mountain View)
- More options/support for youth 14-25 to get off to a good start in life
- Within the school systems there needs to be a better model and effort to urge youth to go to college and help them plan or map out a career path
- More support from other communities and groups to outreach and serve the Pacific Islander community
- Improve information channels to do a better job communicating, outreaching to and connecting youth and their parents (at-risk/low income) to opportunities and programs targeted to them

HABITS + HAPPENINGS Feedback

What is there to do?:

- Always looking for the most cost effective way of recreating because I have 5 kids and most options cost a lot of money to do family outings. Need more free/low cost events. Can be done by requiring volunteer time or help with fundraisers to support having the events free/low cost.
- Volunteer opportunities, but most are not being utilized or taken advantage of by low income communities. Many do not volunteer because they do not see a direct benefit to themselves. And they have other obligations.
- Go to Walmart, Costco.
- Drive around the city and go to Ship Creek and McHugh Creek, look for places that are free.
- Networking events and social gatherings by business entities and organizations [challenge is to connect those micro-networks/movements to local physical communities]
- Outdoor activities, most cost effective [parks]
- Go to recreation center

To meet people?:

- Coffee shops and cafes
- MySpace and FaceBook
- Take a class
- Church
- Recreation Centers
- Schools
- Sporting events

Where do you wish you could meet people?:

- At the library
- At book stores (Barnes & Noble and Tidal Wave)
- Cafes (but it's hard to do b/c people hang out in tight groups, you have to connect with someone from that group in a different space to infiltrate at cafes)
- Bingo
- Mall

How do you use Technology?

- "Land lines"
- Texting
- Cell phone w/ web mechanisms ("without it, I'd die")
- Email + Twitter (Twitter for socializing)
- Laptop ("without it, is the 2nd death")
- Camera
- Weekly: FaceBook, blogging
- Would like access to wi-fi in public spaces
- Monthly: Toonlet (programming/designing online)

Where do you get information?

- Google
- Text messages
- YouTube
- Internet
- News online
- Parent
- wikis/twitter
- online forums to get product information (may twitter first and let others do the work)
- phone
- ADN, Channel 2, KSKA

How do you use information?

- Careful with use of text messages because some folks have limited plans
- “If you’re not credible, I’m not listening” - I pay attention to WHO the information comes from
- Career Advancement
- access to online journals
- classes on software (MS Word, MS Access, other classes are too expensive)
- Cultural Resources like: Documentary Series [for example the PBS series, We Shall Remain - docudrama series]
- Career sections w/ local contacts make it relevant with who in the community is reading/using tools/books - do like in bookstores) and find a way to connect it online w/ blogs/twitter, ect. and connect it to locals with credibility.
- Geo and Census Mapping tools

I use Libraries to/as:

- meeting space
- look for software
- when I owe money
- do an online search first and then drive to the location
- 4-5 of the participants say they don’t use the Loussac library
- use inter-library loan with the University
- online blog
- computer lab
- take my nephews to do homework
- go to read the *New York Times*

Observations/What would be useful:

- Story time for kids
- when asking (today) how to get a library card if you lived in Anchorage, and had a dissatisfying customer service experience (unfriendly and no eye contact), this is especially negative for Alaska Native residents from smaller rural communities who are moving here to Alaska and have little to no experience with libraries. One experience like this may turn them away from ever coming back.
- A guy was looking at pornography and it was reported to the librarian who said it was allowed
- Library looks like it has not changed since I used it in my childhood - 10-15 years ago. This does not say that it is a dynamic, community space.
- There is no active engagement with all the community and ethnic groups in the community and this is surprising.
- I remember and still love those chairs that outlined the human form from when I was a child.
- I remember read-a-thons being hosted when I was a kid. Where are they? (Clare pointed out they have moved to the schools)

What could be done to make the library a better place?

- Welcome/Orientation center for different populations as a continuum of an outreach plan (emerging ethnic communities, communities relocating from rural Alaska)
- Advertise - use the homepage as a marketing tool. Do a better job getting the word out about what's going on at the Library.
- Get on Facebook and twitter with feeds about what's happening. Update use of technology to communicate and market.
- The library needs to become a magnet, it needs a consistent magnet to attract young populations there Mon-Sun. Videogame/gaming room, and other activities, use a volunteer/mutually beneficial partnership model to meet library needs and needs of youth while keeping cost free
- Spaces to do workshops and have open dialogues
- A Community day or rotating "Day's" for different community groups (especially with mountainview branch) to use the space for community events, gatherings, classes, ect.
- connecting and utilizing community talents and providing intersecting meeting points. Look at other communities that host productivity "jellies" where folks come together to work, share information, brainstorm, ect.
- We need to redefine what we think a library is: a place to educate, access resources, be b/ or connect to your community
- More diverse set of users. How? Intentionally networking and collaborating/ partnering with different community groups
- Become a community center - incorporate those aspects into the library (Rec Center and Boys & Girls Club model), put into a dance floor, for example (floor for break dancers to use)
- Open the door
- Connecting library with parks and the outdoors
- Use things/tools/programs that folks are already familiar with (have a relationship with – i.e., partner with other groups)
- Place to be seen, be visible
- Update materials
- What are the intersections where people have passion for something - connect to those. There are lots of small splashes/micro-movements to connect to and build with
- Really identify what the community wants
- connect to the churches
- word of mouth through "credible" community spokespersons/stakeholders/organizers
- Survey may not be the best tool to find out what the community wants
- Use college students - this is a group that is about to do something. Connect to the center for community engagement
- Make being in the community and having someone manage community relations a priority for staff time and budget
- Bookmobile - Denmark model
- Updated community calendar of major community events statewide to facilitate planning and communication - serve as a community resource
- Twitter feeds
- Organizational/community survey on what can we offer that would appeal to you. Give groups control over what programs are then developed. Approach community groups with a reciprocal model to offer services in exchange for partnerships with reciprocity ("what are you willing to do to help" – volunteer, organize fundraisers, etc.).