

WORKSHOP 2

Skills for Community-Centered Libraries

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS

This workshop incorporates Malcolm Knowles's "Six Principles of Adult Learning."¹ They are:

- Adults are self-directed in their learning experiences.
- Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to the learning environment/experience.
- Adults are goal oriented.
- Adults need to know that what they're learning is relevant.
- Adults learn by doing.
- Adults prefer variety in learning.

As you engage with your group and these materials, you'll see that activities incorporate these principles in different ways. They are designed to create substantive discussion and learning opportunities.

Because of the nature of the topics, there will not be "right" or "wrong" answers throughout much of the workshop. Rather, you're asked to reflect on various ideas, techniques, topics, etc. and use those that are relevant for your unique work and unique communities. An open mind is key for everyone during this process; therefore, avoid any tendencies to tell people "the right answer." Rather, ask questions to help one another uncover how to use the information in a way relevant to their communities. Additionally, ask for ideas and expertise from other participants to answer questions. During this workshop, you're encouraged to talk about what you currently know and do in your work and find connections, even differences throughout the workshop. Making connections and finding differences helps to reframe thinking and learn new ideas and skills.

We acknowledge that everyone in this room is coming into this training with varying levels of knowledge and comfort with this topic. For some participants, this information will be new and help them begin the engagement process with their library community. Some participants may know this information, but these workshops will allow you to examine whether you are implementing these topics in your daily practice and consider opportunities to improve these skills. Other participants will have strong knowledge and expertise in community engagement. If this is true for you, we ask that you share

¹ Knowles, M. S. (1984). *Andragogy in action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

your insights and best practices and consider this time an opportunity to reflect on how you can help others at your library home in these community engagement practices.

Ultimately this workshop is meant to be a space for all library staff to reflect on the work they do and shift their professional practices and mindset toward a common goal of community engagement *for their communities as defined by their communities*.

OVERVIEW WORKSHOP 2: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Community-centered libraries require you to form and sustain relationships with community partners. This workshop will address fundamental ideas about effective communication with a variety of audiences; communication is key to any relationship. You will reflect on the life experiences and lenses that impact how you communicate, review strategies for effective communication, practice behaviors that demonstrate active listening, and develop the skill of open-ended questioning. By the end of the workshop, you will leave with enhanced skills to facilitate deeper discussions and stronger connections with community members.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this workshop, you will be able to:

My Lens	... reflect on the life experiences and lenses that impact how you communicate
Iceberg	... understand that the experiences, traditions, and beliefs of others are not initially visible and can potentially be uncovered with deeper connections
Effective Communication	... analyze your conversational tendencies ... practice behaviors that demonstrate active listening ... develop the skill of open-ended questioning to facilitate deeper discussions and stronger connections

VOCABULARY AND TERMS

Lens: A personal way of interpreting the world

Iceberg: A metaphor for an individual's lived experiences. That is, if any individual were an iceberg, we would only see what's above the water. Below the water are many more lived experiences that we can't see.

GROUND RULES²

Creating a Space to Share Ideas and Thoughts

- One speaker, one mic
 - ◆ One person speaks at a time
- No one knows everything, together we know a lot
 - ◆ Each person brings different levels of lived experience and embodied expertise to the conversation
 - ◆ Let's all practice being humble and look for what we can learn from each other
- Move up, move up
 - ◆ If you're someone who tends to not speak a lot, please move up into a role of speaking more
 - ◆ If you tend to speak a lot, please move up into a role of listening more
- We can't be articulate all the time
 - ◆ People can feel hesitant to participate for fear of "messaging up" or stumbling over their words
- Embrace curiosity
 - ◆ We make better decisions when we approach our problems and challenges with a question ("What if we...?") and curiosity
- Acknowledge the difference between intent and impact
 - ◆ If someone says or does something that causes harm they must take responsibility for the negative impact

Insert your rules here:

- _____
- _____
- _____

If at any time you would like to revise or add an idea to this list, please share your thoughts with the facilitator and the whole group.

² Adapted from Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance. (2017). *Anti-oppressive facilitation for democratic process*.

MY EXPERIENCE: MY LENS

Word Association Activity

Our cultures, races, faiths, socio-economic statuses, neighborhoods, and life experiences, among many other factors, shape the lenses with which we view the world. These lenses then shape the way in which we communicate, whether we recognize it or not.



How do we uncover what's happening behind our lenses? One method is through introspection: looking inside ourselves and analyzing our own thoughts, feelings, and biases. Looking inward helps us understand how our lenses and life experiences impact the way we communicate with our library communities (and our communities at large). We all see situations differently as a result of our varied lenses and life experiences.

Directions: Take 3 minutes to create a list of words or short phrases that you associate with the phrase "My Self." Do NOT write complete sentences or explanations. You can use any words,³ labels, job titles, adjectives, etc., that you want to describe your life. (Examples: mother, singer, artist, baker, divorced, vegetarian, bilingual, gender-fluid, liberal, conservative, sports fan, religious, yogi, white, African American, etc.)



³ Use words different from the strengths you identified in Workshop 1.

Discuss

Talk with a partner or partners about what you wrote. Select one or two words/short phrases that have the biggest impact on your view of the world—they are your lens. Explain why to your partner.

Reflection Opportunity: Life Experience Connection

Choose one of the words, or a set of words, from your discussion that you associate with a deep life experience you’ve had. For example, maybe you wrote “mother” or “biracial.” That is a primary lens through which you see the world. This life experience has had a major impact on you and has allowed you to have a level of empathy and connection with people who experience the world in a similar way.

“My Self” word/phrase: _____

In the space below, reflect on how life experiences shape your relationship to others around you. How do your lenses impact how you interact with others?
How do other people’s lenses impact how they relate to you?

Discuss: *With a partner, talk about your life experience connection.*

1 Explain how that deep life experience makes it easier for you to communicate with others with the same life experience.

2 What experiences *don't* you have that others might? How might that impact your lens of communication or your ability to be empathetic?

3 How do positions of power that you and others hold impact communication?

OTHERS' LIFE EXPERIENCES: THE ICEBERG

Discussion Activity

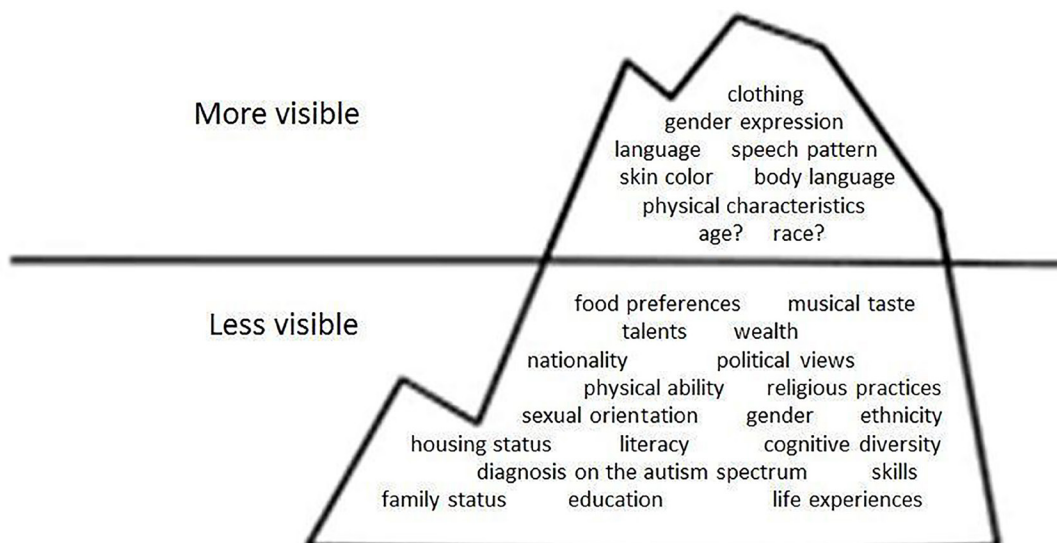
The way we communicate and the beliefs we have are deeply layered. Our life experiences impact how we connect and communicate with others. At the same time, those with whom we're communicating also have a lived experience that they're bringing to the interaction. They also have lenses through which they see the world. Because of the different aspects individuals bring to an interaction, communication is complex.

Before we get to strategies for clear communication, it's important to take a moment and uncover the many layers and hidden experiences that impact communication.

The Waterline of Visibility

This iceberg helps us to visualize each person as an iceberg. You'll notice that there are aspects of a person that we can see, which we may or may not see accurately because of assumptions we make about appearances. There are also other core values and individual characteristics that are brought to every interaction that we don't know.

Sample Cultural Iceberg



Iceberg Analysis Discussion Questions

Analyze the iceberg by discussing it with your group.

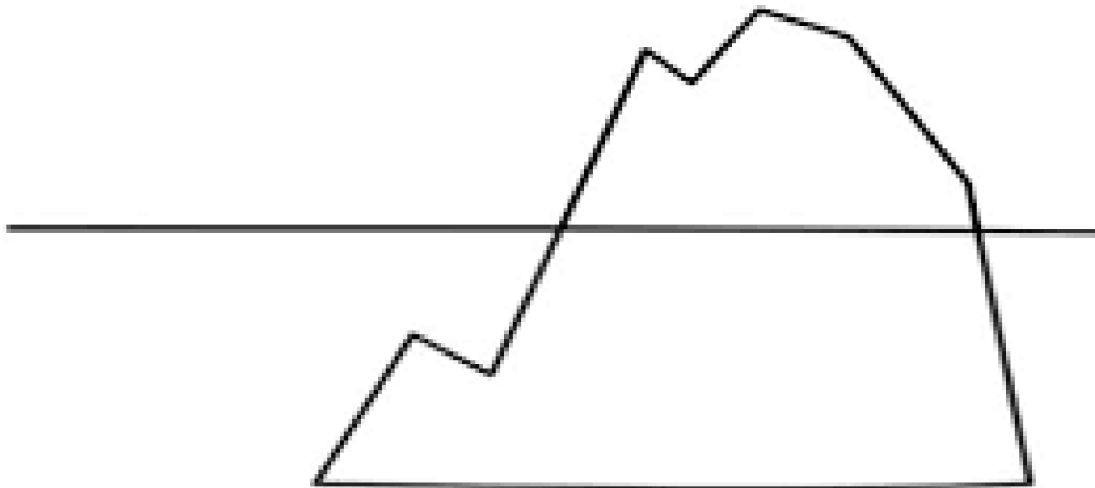
- 1** Why is it important to keep this iceberg in mind when performing our daily roles at the library? How does it impact communication?
- 2** What physical characteristics above the waterline may be misinterpreted? Why?
- 3** People reveal more about themselves when they are comfortable and feel welcomed and valued. What are some of the specific strategies your library employs to create an inclusive, welcoming culture that shows patrons they are valued? For example, do you have welcome signs with library hours and programs translated into multiple languages?
- 4** Based on your unique community, consider one additional way you could promote an inclusive, welcoming culture.
- 5** Consider a patron or group of patrons that you have struggled to connect with in the past. What ways could you attempt to connect with this person or group in relation to their iceberg?

Notes

MY ICEBERG

Reflection Activity

Directions: Create your own iceberg. Use ideas from the "My Life" word association activity and the Life Experience Connection activity to begin filling out your iceberg. BE SPECIFIC. So, instead of writing, "religion," identify your religion as "Christian," "Muslim," "Jewish," etc., on your iceberg. Include three items you are comfortable sharing above the surface and five items you are comfortable sharing below the surface.



Discuss: Looking at your iceberg, which idea(s) did you write that you are certain impact your communication with others? How so? For example, if you're a parent, you might find it exciting to talk about children with people and enjoy the opportunities to share stories about your children.

Are there aspects of your iceberg that people rarely see? Is there something below the surface that you would like to connect with more people about? Are there ways you can use all parts of your iceberg that can help you connect more deeply with your library community?

COMMUNICATION: A SELF SURVEY

What Do I Do When I Talk?

What are your conversational tendencies? Read each statement. Mark X under Yes or No for each statement.

	Yes	No
Make eye contact.		
Use a calm, patient tone.		
Stay on topic.		
Turn my body towards the person I am speaking to.		
State as little as possible; I like to keep conversations brief.		
Purposely listen to make meaning of what is being said.		
Show interest by nodding, facial expressions of reaction, etc.		
Wait until the person is completely done talking to respond.		
Restate what the person has said for clarification.		

Discuss your answers with your partner and answers these questions:

1 How does knowing how you communicate help you to communicate with others?

2 Why is it important to adapt to others' communication styles or preferences in your day-to-day role in your library?

3 How might an individual's life experiences and lenses impact their styles of communication?

ROLE-PLAYS AND OBSERVATION

Observing and Reflecting on Live Communication

For this activity, you will work in groups of three people: Role A, Role B, Role C. If there is a group of four people, two people can be Role C.

Directions for Round 1

Total time: 6 minutes (~ 3 minutes for role-play, ~ 3 minutes for Role C observer feedback.)

Role A: Library staff member—be yourself.

Role B: Choose a role.

English Language Learner: You've just moved to the United States. You can speak some English; you studied it in high school and a year in college. You were told that the library can help you find a job and sign up for services, so you ask the first person you see at the entrance for help.

Caregiver (toddler/pre-school age): You've just received temporary custody of your niece due to some problems that her parents are trying to work out. You come to the library looking for a resource list of affordable daycares in the community as you're starting a new job in a few weeks. You don't have your own kids so you are new to finding resources for children.

Job Seeker: You have come to the library to work on your resume and print out several copies to take to various grocery stores and restaurants tomorrow, since it's your day off. This is your first time doing a full resume as you've been working at the same local grocery chain for over ten years, so you're also hoping a librarian can help you make it look good.

Security Guard: As the security guard at your library, you're very familiar with the customers and know most by name. In fact, you have insight into their family dynamics, library routines, general characteristics, and even some of their interests. You've developed a trusting and friendly relationship with a group of pre-teen boys who use the library after school regularly and in the summers. They don't attend much programming, but they do use the library for the computers and as a place to hang out. They said the programming, in general, doesn't interest them. You aren't sure how the library determines which programs to run. You know the boys often talk about sports and often talk about statistics related to sports, especially soccer. You've decided to approach your library manager and suggest a teen reading club centered on sports. It's taken you a lot of courage to decide to initiate this conversation because your overall experience is that security guards don't always have input to what programs are offered.

Role C: You will observe the interaction between Roles A and B, take notes on their interaction using the observation form on the next page, and provide feedback about what each person did.

Observation Form

Directions: *Observer: Use the table below to record your observations. Use the space under each role to take notes on what you observe in order to provide concrete feedback to your partners.*

Behaviors to watch for	Role A	Role B
Uses a calm, patient tone		
Speaks in short, clear sentences		
Makes eye contact		
Avoids sarcastic comments		
Asks varied types of questions (open, closed)		
Present and ready to serve		
Listens sympathetically		
Backchannels (nodding, eye contact, facial expressions of reaction)		
Concludes with a summary statement		
Demonstrates open body language		

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

List of Ideas

Throughout your day, you engage in verbal, nonverbal, spoken, and written communication. Communication is fundamental to your success, and it's important to regularly reflect on how we communicate and how it impacts those around us. To start this workshop today, you answered the question: *How would you describe good/effective communication?* Through our next activity, we will be reviewing that list and reflecting on if/when we personally use these strategies.

Directions: *Review the list with the whole group.*

Tips for Effective Speaking

- 1 Use a calm, patient tone
- 2 Speak in clear, short sentences
- 3 Make eye contact. (However, neurodiverse patrons may avoid eye contact when engaging in conversations. Additionally, certain cultures avoid eye contact as a way of showing respect.)
- 4 Avoid sarcastic comments
- 5 Ask varied types of questions (open, closed)
- 6 To prevent confusion, avoid using phrasal verbs (such as "check it out") and idiomatic expressions (such as "sit tight" or "not my cup of tea") when communicating with English Language Learners or neurodiverse patrons
- 7 Utilize the passive voice as a de-escalation technique

Tips for Effective Listening

- 1 Be present and ready to serve
- 2 Listen sympathetically. Believe that it is your duty to try to make meaning of the speaker's message, especially when interacting with non-native English speakers or neurodivergent patrons
- 3 Backchannel (i.e. nodding, eye contact, facial expressions of reaction, etc.) to show interest and understanding
- 4 Listen and try to visualize what the speaker is saying
- 5 Don't interrupt; let the speaker give their full explanation. Interrupting can send a signal of being rushed or pushed aside. However, interrupting should not be completely avoided in cases where individuals have gone far off topic and/or are speaking incoherently for a substantial period of time. Use your professional judgment on when to interrupt, but try to make sure that you have given the speaker sufficient time to share their thoughts. Interrupting also becomes much more acceptable and understandable when you have a close relationship established. If you do need to interrupt, try to use a sentence starter like, *"If I may just interrupt for a second...."*
- 6 Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions
- 7 Pay attention to what *isn't* said
- 8 Observe non-verbal cues and their meaning
- 9 Conclude with a summary statement to assure understanding

Discuss: What does effective body language look like? How might life experiences, lenses, and personal icebergs impact body language?

QUESTION TYPES

Closed vs. Open-Ended Questions

As you can see, there is a LOT that goes into effective communication. In addition to some of the tips and strategies already discussed, it's also important to consider the types of questions you're asking as you seek to understand what's happening in a conversation.

While there are many types of questions, two types that we need to be consciously aware of are open-ended vs. closed questions. Open-ended questions allow for a more detailed response. Engaging in open-ended dialogue provides the opportunity to understand aspects of a person that are below the water line. Open-ended questions prompt responses with a bit more opinion, detail, and reasoning, allowing the receiver to understand more about what the sender is saying.

The process of asking a series of open-ended questions is similar to the "reference interviews" library staff use to clarify a customer's initial request before suggesting specific resources.

Closed vs. Open-Ended Questions

Closed Questions	Open Questions
Should staff be trained on how to deal with opioid use in the library?	How would you go about dealing with the opioid use/impact on the library system?
Do you think we accurately measure the success of our programs?	How would you define success for our programs?
Do our programs reflect community needs?	What could we do to better assure that our programs truly connect to expressed community needs?

Directions: Rewrite the closed questions as open-ended questions. Each is an example of a question a library staff member might ask a community member.

1 Do you need help?

2 Have you been to library programs before?

3 Are you familiar with our bilingual children's story time?

4 Has your child attended our Lego building club?

5 Do you know about our résumé writing workshop every Tuesday?

MORE ROLE-PLAYS AND OBSERVATION

Observing and Reflecting on Live Communication

Directions for Round 2

Total time: 8 minutes (~ 3 minutes for role play, ~ 5 minutes for Role C observer feedback and group discussion.)

Role A is still the library staff member. **Role A** should *focus on using specific communication strategies to improve the interaction.*

Role B should pick a different role. **Role B** should *focus on using specific communication strategies to improve the interaction.*

Role C is still the observer, using the form on pg. 26.

Observation Form

Directions: *Observer: Use the table below to record your observations. Use the space under each role to take notes on what you observe in order to provide concrete feedback to your partners.*

Behaviors to watch for	Role A	Role B
Uses a calm, patient tone		
Speaks in short, clear sentences		
Makes eye contact		
Avoids sarcastic comments		
Asks varied types of questions (open, closed)		
Present and ready to serve		
Listens sympathetically		
Backchannels (nodding, eye contact, facial expressions of reaction)		
Concludes with a summary statement		
Demonstrates open body language		

Round 2 Debrief

Observer: What were the biggest improvements you noticed after providing feedback and reviewing the tips and question types with the library staff member? What were the biggest improvements you noticed after providing feedback and reviewing the tips and question types with the customer?

Library Staff Member: How did your interaction change when you incorporated more effective communication strategies? Which strategies do you need to focus on when you return to your library?

Community Member: How did your interaction change when you incorporated more effective communication strategies? Which strategies do you need to focus on when you return to your library?

All: What is it like to pay close attention to a conversation like this? What did you learn/realize? What about your life experiences, lenses, or communication style impacted the WAY that you communicated? How so?

Discussion Questions

1 Which communication strategies did you consciously use to try to connect with and understand each other?

2 Think of a time when using an effective communication strategy or open-ended questions could have prevented a miscommunication with a library patron.

3 If you participated in the Security Guard role-play, consider how you can empower and engage members of your library team to share insights regarding programming and the needs of your community.

4 Are there life experiences, lenses or communication styles that impede you from connecting with others when you are communicating? How might you reframe your lens to be more open during communication?

5 How could you strategically use these communication tools with your team to improve channels of communication with library patrons?

6 Reflect on how using Belbin's Team Roles may create a space for team members to share their unique knowledge and insight.

STRENGTHS AND STRETCHES

Self-Evaluation

Directions: Reflect on each of the skills we discussed today. What are your areas of strength for each skill? In what ways can you stretch to develop this skill further or share this skill with your library team?

Strengths	Stretches
Iceberg	Iceberg
Effective Speaking and Listening	Effective Speaking and Listening
Open-Ended Questions	Open-Ended Questions

WORKSHOP REVIEW

Personal Thoughts

Directions: *Your table's note taker will answer the questions below on a flipchart. Then, create action statements about how you can apply what you've learned.*

- 1 What did YOU learn today? Share your personal moments of realization or anything you learned that will improve your community engagement practices:

- 2 How can you TAKE what we talked about today and TURN it into action?

TAKE AND TURN

Workshop 2: Effective Communication

First, complete your personal iceberg on pg. 15. Next, you will need to reflect on one conversation you had in your library. It can be with a library community member or a staff member. It would be best to pick a conversation that is engaging rather than transactional (i.e., not someone asking where the restroom is). This could be small-talk conversation or exchanges during a meeting or program. Reflect on your conversation with this individual. Use the template to guide your reflection.

Date of conversation: _____

Who was the conversation with? (Do not need a name, but a few details would be useful):

What was the main topic of this conversation?

Use the checklist to reflect on best practices for effective speaking and listening. If you used a strategy well and intentionally (that is, you were aware of using the strategy), place a checkmark next to it.

Did I consciously....

- remember to reflect on the notion that we all have individual icebergs and what is below the surface impacts the conversation?
- use a calm, patient tone?
- speak in clear, short sentences?

- make eye contact (when appropriate)?
- avoid sarcastic comments?
- ask varied types of questions (open, closed)?
- present and ready to serve?
- listen sympathetically?
- backchannel (nodding, eye contact, facial expressions of reaction)?
- conclude with a summary statement?
- demonstrate open body language?

Look back at your iceberg on pg. 15 and the items you placed above and below the surface. Reflect on how your lens and iceberg may have impacted the conversation. What did you notice? Were there any life experiences or personal identifiers that you listed that you think created a lens that was beneficial to this conversation? Why or why not?

Optional: Share with a trusted coworker or friend/loved one something that you learned about yourself and your communication skills from this activity. That's it, simply share what you learned and see if you can inspire another person to consider their own communication styles and how their life experiences may impact their interactions.



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