
PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to be a trusted space where people, ideas, and resources meet. Outreach and partnerships extend your library's impact beyond the building, help you reach new audiences, and create lasting relationships that benefit both the library and the community. So how do you do it?

1. Identify Your Potential Partners

Partnerships don't have to be complicated or formal. They just need shared purpose.

- **Local Organizations:** Senior centers, historical societies, food pantries, art councils.
- **Civic Groups:** Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood associations.
- **Local Businesses:** Coffee shops, bookstores, farmer's markets, craft stores.
- **Service Agencies:** Social services, housing authorities, literacy councils.
- **Unique Local Gems:** Museums, community gardens, local musicians, hobby clubs.

2. Start Small, Build Big

- Begin with one low-stakes project like hosting a joint program, sharing flyers, or co-sponsoring a small event.
- Focus on partners who already share your audience or mission.
- Use existing community events (fairs, festivals, holiday celebrations) to connect naturally.

3. Be a Good Partner

- **Listen first:** Learn their goals before suggesting library involvement.
- **Share the spotlight:** Co-brand materials or highlight their contributions.
- **Be consistent:** Follow through on commitments, communicate often, and show appreciation.

4. Outreach Tips that Work

- Attend community meetings, not just as a library rep, but as an active participant.
- Offer library services outside of your building: pop-up storytimes, mobile Wi-Fi, library card sign-up tables.
- Use social media to spotlight partners, not just your own programs.
- Keep a community calendar so you know what's happening and can join in.

5. Overcoming Common Barriers

- **Small staff?** Partner with groups who can provide volunteers or resources.
- **Limited budget?** Focus on collaborations that share costs or use donated space/materials.
- **New to the community?** Spend the first few months listening and learning before suggesting joint projects.

Action Step for This Month

Create a “Partnership Possibilities” list. Write down 10 potential partners in your area, note how they connect with your library’s mission, and choose one to reach out to in the next 30 days.

Quick Win Ideas

- Library card sign-up booth at a local festival.
- Partner with a local coffee shop for a “Books & Brew” club.
- Invite a local expert to teach a workshop in their specialty.
- Create a “community voices” display featuring work from local artists or writers.

The strongest partnerships are built on trust, mutual benefit, and shared vision. By stepping beyond your walls, you invite the community to see the library not just as a place, but as a partner.