

Oh, the Places We'll Know! Big Ideas for Libraries in Communities

By Gillian Guilmant-Smith and Stephen Karr

On September 19th, SFU Public Square convened a Community Summit on the topic of Big Ideas for Libraries in Communities. For this event, SFU asked participants from all walks of life to submit ideas that explore how libraries can expand their role in building community while advancing civic engagement across community and cultural divides. The entries were then shortlisted by a jury and the top ten participants were invited to pitch their idea to the public in 5 minutes or less.

The event itself, held in the Segal Room at SFU's downtown campus, opened with welcoming remarks from Andrew Petter, President and Vice-Chancellor, SFU and Charles Eckman, Dean of Library Services, SFU. Baharak Yousefi, Head, Fraser Valley Real Estate Board Academic Library, SFU then took to the stage to introduce the jury and participants and to set the tone for this fast-paced event.

Here is a summary of the 5 minute presentations:

1. Sara Grant & Cyndy Hill **The Little Free Library That Could.** Sara and Cyndy presented their idea for a book sharing box that would serve as a free community library. Their colourful presentation showed examples of unique and artfully designed boxes in various neighbourhood settings. The lending model would operate on the premise of "take a book, leave a book" with community volunteers stocking and maintaining the collection, connecting neighbours through good books.
2. Kevin Stranack **Facilitating Participatory Communities: An Open, Online, Collaborative Course for Everyone, Everywhere.** Kevin's idea centred on the concept of digital literacy. He argued that in the age of Web 2.0 and the growing digital divide (created when people have neither the skills nor the technology to participate) libraries need to take the lead in building broader digital literacy skills. In order to do this, he suggested that libraries (public, academic, school and more) join together to

create a digital literacy MOOC (an open online course) to foster digital communities.

3. Kari Kristensen **ArtVan.** Kari proposed a mobile art library that collects and distributes art. The advantages are that it is free, and it doesn't have a due date. She started with the premise that everyone should have access to original works of art; art gives a sense of place, and it makes you think. She said that the problem is that art is not cheap. Using a library to host it has the advantage of being free.
4. Dale McCartney **Libraries with Class.** Pointing out that most workers are now in retail and food industries, and that 13% of these workers are non-unionized, Dale proposed setting up a workers' resources centre in public libraries. This centre will inform patrons of training and job opportunities. Workers will also be able to share pertinent information such as wage rates or bad employers. Finally, it can be a centre to organize workers who are not currently organized. Community libraries are meant to support workers' rights.
5. Tara Robertson **Creating Connections Through Digitization.** Tara talked about creating connections through digitization; connections from past to present, connections between content and place, and connections between people in communities. She brought forward neat examples of digitalization projects such as the New York Public Library's historical menus collection (online at <http://menus.nypl.org/>) where users are encouraged to engage with the content and assign metadata. She feels that libraries could help with storage issues and become a virtual "3rd space".
6. Daniel Irvine & Matthew Beall **The 2.(c)(d) Library: On Libraries, Democracy, and the Private Side of Public Space.** Daniel and Matthew suggested the idea of digital kiosks.

Private rooms will be connected to the library. There will be large assembly precincts, where customers can have space to privately assemble. They premised this idea on what they perceive as the erosion of freedom of expression, due to privatization of public space, and government monitoring of our activities.

7. Shirley Lew **Library is OPEN**. Shirley feels that the library should get into the business of selling books. She spoke about the closing of locally owned, small bookstores (such as Duthies and Book Warehouse) and the rise of big box stores like Chapters. She argued that every bookshop closure creates a loss in our communities – a loss of sense of place and diversity and a loss of a sense of possibility and alternate voices. The library could provide low rent space with a cost recovery model while highlighting local authors.
8. Justin Unrau **Your Friendly Neighbourhood Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy**. Justin said he wants libraries to make it easier to share electronic content and integrate it with how people use the internet. He wants libraries to buy material, and then share it as broadly as they can. This means taking digital devices such as CDs, DVDs, and ebooks, and breaking the locks on them that prevent sharing. The community-building aspect of this idea includes training people on the ethics of piracy, and how to use torrenting to hide your activities.
9. Alison Campbell & Michelle Callaghan **Community Pods: Create Connections through Shared Experiences**. Alison and Michelle's central idea is a pod located in a library. It has flexible walls, and has an OPAC in the middle. The pod is a venue where a member of the public can arrange to teach things to others. It uses a bulletin board concept where potential students sign up for

a class. Through this project, communities are built one connection at a time.

10. Jon Whipple **Makers of Meaning**. Through the lens of graphic design, Jon imagines libraries as places where ideas, digital objects, and artefacts collide and libraries become makers of meaning. In these spaces, people come together to make tools that will make us smarter and connect us to each other. He feels that libraries can become community specific publishers in an environment where libraries produce for or along with the patron.

Summary

Following the presentations, the audience members had the opportunity afterward to anonymously provide written feedback for each of the presenters. In addition, attendees had the opportunity to vote for the top three presentations.

The ballots were subsequently counted, and there was a tie for first place. The top four presentations were:

1. Tara Robertson (**Creating Connections Through Digitization**) & Shirley Lew (**Library is OPEN**)
2. Alison Campbell & Michelle Callaghan (**Community Pods: Create Connections through Shared Experiences**)
3. Kevin Stranack (**Facilitating Participatory Communities: An Open, Online, Collaborate Course for Everyone, Everywhere**)

The presenters, attendees, sponsors, and SFU were all thanked for their contributions to the evening.

Gillian Guilman-Smith is the Assistant Manager, Multicultural Services at the Vancouver Public Library.

Stephen Karr is Past Chair and Website and Social Media Coordinator with the Library Technicians and Assistants Section.