

Everybody's business

By Amber Saundry.

On Friday morning at the BC Library Conference, "Everybody's business: The benefits, barriers, and best practices of building deeper connections with business" was presented by Mark Bodnar, Business Liaison Librarian from the Bennett Library at Simon Fraser University (SFU), and Aleha McCauley, Community Engagement Librarian from the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

"Everybody's business" looked at various library environments and contexts, and what community engagement entails; the overarching feeling amongst the group was that it involved the building of trusting, respectful connections, and the maintenance of these relationships. Mark and Aleha conducted the session in a workshop-style format, encouraging "spirited discussion" and collaboration. Tools such as post-it notes, presentation posters, coloured pens, and chocolates enhanced and encouraged this interactive atmosphere, and were well-received.

Participants were asked to share their experiences, and discuss who their community was, what kind of community engagement they were already doing, and if any involved engagement with business. Some examples of partnerships included those between public libraries and local businesses, such as malls and recreational or community centres. Others discussed inviting local businesses or associations into their libraries.

The session then shifted to answer specific questions about community engagement and libraries. The local chamber of commerce, mall businesses, non-profit organizations, and career centres were identified as potential businesses that could be collaborative partners with the library. Strategies as

to how to demonstrate what libraries can offer to business included "ears to the ground," physical space and equipment, resource expertise, and a network of relationships. One such example of a way to engage and target users was a focus on communicating what questions libraries can answer, as opposed to purely demonstrating or advertising their resources. For the library, engagement with business can support local entrepreneurship, cultivate stewardship, and optimize collection development.

The barriers to community engagement were also discussed. Some issues involved restrictive policies, high costs, businesses already holding their own resources to take care of their own needs, a difference in values, and licensing with databases (including the difficulty of commercial-use purposes). Although these are recognized challenges, the speakers discussed strategies to bring down some of these barriers and turn them into opportunities (such as working closely with special libraries and archives). To conclude the session, participants were asked to dream big, think about what they could do in their library to increase engagement with community and business, and decide what goals they would aim to accomplish by the 2014 BC Library Conference.

Mark and Aleha have kindly put together a website with further information on their presentation, and related resources. It can be found at <http://www.sba-bc.ca/topic/conferences>.

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