



Responses to questions from Libraries Build Pathways to Wellbeing – RIPL August 26, 2020

In case you want one on one chats: My primary work responsibility and role is to help public librarians see themselves in their local community wellbeing networks, using this research and its findings. Don't hesitate to take my time or ask your town specific questions. It is my job to answer them. Also, I'm not selling anything so don't worry that I'll suddenly be like, "And if you want an answer you'll have to hire me," or something. I'm a public servant. research@rurallibraries.org

Q1. *Perhaps you've said this already, but is this information written up in a report that's publicly available?*

Yes and more to come. First off, if what you would like is our primary paper go here: <https://osf.io/m9kwu/>. This link will take you to the pre-print of the paper (it was submitted to PLOS One on August 9th). You'll also see a **workbook there for any data table** translated into a figure within the paper. Open Science Framework is where we keep everything and if there is a detail that you want having to do with the findings and results, you will find it within our overall project registration: <https://osf.io/wb56g/>. If you want a quick chat about navigating the project repository so you can get any and all information you want, send me an email: research@rurallibraries.org.

And about the more to come: our Executive Summary of findings is under review right now and will be sent out to everyone on our mailing list September 9th. Field reports from each of our eight case study locations will begin rolling out in October along with Findings to Policy briefs where we describe the policy implications of distinct research results.

Finally, our website is currently in the process of overhaul by web accessibility and design specialists MindShare Labs. We'll be updating content, but until November-ish, probably the best place to find publications is in our OSF pre-prints folder: <https://osf.io/5pxv3/>. Or send me an email to be signed up for updates. Notification options include: Beta-tool releases (for 2 more weeks), Project News & Publications, Events & Webinars, and Final Tool and Learning space launch.

Q2. *Where do I find the tools?*

Our beta-tools space is <https://rurallibraries.org/beta-tools>. This page will become invisible to visitors on September 16th, 2020 and something new will emerge by January 1, 2021.

Q3. *What is the last day to try the tools?*

September 15th, 2020. Visit <https://rurallibraries.org/beta-tools>. The last tool the team will publish will release on September 9th and then we'll begin our process of detailed evaluation and revision.

Q4. *What summit was going to happen this past March in Fairhope Alabama?*

This is a question I for sure did not anticipate getting! We were supposed to meet the Sunday after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic (March 15-18). Actually, Isabel War Trujillo who was driving **wasn't notified of the cancellation** (Thursday before) until she was one the road. As a group we have been fortunate enough not to have seen any major illness on the Creation Team. And the pivot the whole group made to the world's **weirdest gone-virtual summit** was pretty inspiring.

Q5. *The part on implication of findings went right over my head? What did you learn from the research that has implications for strategic planning & practice? More nature. Less Knowledge? :-) Focus on Social Connection?*

Hmm. Sorry about that. There was some connective thinking tissue that got cut when I started cutting content. Here's a paragraph cut from the Executive Summary currently under review:

“Libraries wanting to improve their social wellbeing impacts may need to revise their self-perception to be not just a recipient of mutual support, but an active facilitator. If asked to describe in one term what “pathways to wellbeing” boils down to, we would say, emphatically, social connection. And if there is one thing to take away from this research, it is that increasing widespread and deep social connection, any way you can do it, will lead to improved wellbeing. We heard this described in terms of belonging, mutualism, and self-determination.”

And then I'm going to take your other questions in turn.

Q5a. *Implications of the findings for strategic planning:*

If we take as a given that your purpose in planning is to shift practice to improve social wellbeing outcomes, you will have the following considerations to pay attention to:

- For each neighborhood and/or community that my library serves, what are the ways of doing and being (which we call pathways) that currently lead to good outcomes for that neighborhood / community? [There are many really good tools **available to you if this is a consideration you aren't** sure how to begin assessing – again, hit me up if you want a little one on one idea session on this.]
- Within those neighborhoods / communities, how do individuals contribute and share a sense of belonging?
 - Are there residents who are unattached – not connected to networks of contribution and belonging that exist where they live?
- Within those neighborhoods / communities, how does mutualism currently exist? Between whom, through which institutions / organizations?
 - Are there residents who are living without social insurance – they are detached from networks of mutualism that exist where they live?

- Within those neighborhoods / communities, what are the mechanisms of power, self/collective-expression, and decision making?
 - In examining that power map, add layers of detail for each mechanism of self-determination:
 - capability to determine one's own:**
 - educational access;
 - cultural access and expression;
 - story of place;
 - political interactions;
 - economic security and wellbeing;
 - physical and emotional security.
 - Go through the exercise again through a collective lens with the following additions:
 - nature, scope, and scale of local development
 - economic, social, and cultural future of the community
 - decision making access to community-wide funds, policies, and initiatives.

In all things social wellbeing, we're operating on a longer time scale than the action frame for most strategic plans. So, now that we have an assessment of how social wellbeing is happening, who is in, and who, importantly, is out, we can begin to **mix in the library's vision, objectives, and timebound goals**. Given what we understand about the value of social connection and attachment, you would likely prioritize that area first if those local networks are weak. Again, here are some considerations you might hold in your mind:

- How will the way we plan build pathways of belonging, mutualism, and self-determination here?
- How will we implement our plan so that we reinforce these pathways?

Do you want to get to the end of planning without involving residents in decision making and then be like “here is what we made for you so that you are more well” just to have them say, “we were never unwell!”? Community catalyst does not equal vanguard of misaligned service. Which gets me to the next part of your question (but first a practice detour).

Q5b. *Implications for practice?*

I'd recommend reading the **Shared Understandings for Evidence-Based No Rules Tools** first (<https://rurallibraries.org/beta-tools>). Be human. Take your time. Build connections. Hold yourself and your library accountable to the commitments you make through those connections. Every person we interviewed wants to be seen and feel known (that's right, get to know their names, but through introducing yourself. Pulling it from the patron record is creepy.) They also want to be supported without someone up in their business. That fine line between being a human concerned for and interested in a community resident and thinking you need to fix something about their life might take some practice. Again, if you value each of those folks, then value their ability to contribute value to the community and to the library.

Q5c. *More Nature less Knowledge? Social Connection?*

The risk of graphs, am I right? I mean, sure more nature if there seems to be people who aren't able to access a local resource that might improve their lives if they could. Here's what that divergence means in terms of practice: there are elements of people's lives that they value that has nearly nothing to do with the library. And a role that the library has that the community sees as overwhelmingly clear and important: **knowledge and discovery.** Where the library's role and the community's sense of what makes the good life are most closely aligned are in social connection and contribution.

And, importantly, infrastructure. In isolated rural communities, the library's facility in and of itself is a monumentally important service.

Q6. *Can the screen shares be included in the pdf afterwards?*

Because I'm not sure exactly which screen shares would be helpful, I'll just say that the only time something I shared won't show up in the .pdf, it's because I visited <https://rurallibraries.org/beta-tools> and just started opening the tools. If you do that and would like to talk through some questions you're having, please feel free to reach out to me: research@rurallibraries.org.

Q7. *Wondering if there is more information about marginalized communities? Many of our rural libraries are struggling to engage people of color and people who are struggling financially and people who speak Spanish as their primary language. We've had some success with offering ESL – I think that fits not only under Lifelong Learning but also Supported and Voice/Need to be Heard. Were there any findings in those categories specific to underserved communities (people of color, low-income, English language learners)?*

Although our research discusses how social wellbeing operates within a variety of community specific contexts, nothing yet published calls out specific targeted populations. Nor did we code for population types.

My first question to you might be who is the "our rural libraries"? Who is marginalized is contextual and at what level do they become "marginalized"? In some libraries people of color were represented more heavily than local demographics would say is the "correct" proportionality. In some libraries newcomers, vacationers, and out-of-towners ran the show and in some libraries and their towns, generational residents ran both shows.

What is probably the most immediately practical to know is that where people have power, where their unique contributions are valued and integrated into the mechanism of the library, and the library is itself a porous organization flexibly allowing for residents to be who they are, the way they want to be, we heard the greatest level of human dignity across population subgroups.

Communities within the community are best served by people who are understood to be "of" that community. I know that if you are white you aren't going to suddenly become Black – that is not the only definition of shared identity we heard. It is the ability to not see yourself and your institution as a leader in fixing problems. Rather, to enter a community with the humility of request – to know enough of them that

you can ask for authentic contribution. To be ready for support to be asked of you, even if it doesn't happen for some years. There are very few groups of people who are not already supporting one another. For your library to support them, you'll need to take the position of partnership and backseat taking.

And look for individuals who are not in a group or whom the group has left behind. Attaching them to community so that if they need, there is support is something we are just now beginning to understand and I have no answers for.

Q8. *How did you define contribution?*

Our codebook definition which guided what was tagged with that word is:

Narrator describes: To give to others through skill/knowledge share, volunteerism, philanthropy, and material donation for the benefit of the larger whole.

For the complete codebook and their definitions, go here: <https://osf.io/x7cr8/>

If contribution and its relationship to belonging is of interest to you, my favorite paper on this is by Carnell Chosa, "Attaching Your Heart: Pueblo Community Engagement". It deals specifically with the nature of connection between pueblo youth no longer (or never) living in the pueblo and the pueblo community and heritage. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6351-014-1_9