

Library Self-Assessment Checklist

From Julie Ann Winkelstein

Serving library users experiencing homelessness requires the entire library be behind the effort and that an understanding of homelessness be integrated into every aspect of the library's services and operations.

Note: This Checklist is adapted from the WebJunction "Serving Spanish Speaking Communities Checklist" (Cuesta, 2012) and adapted from the 2019 Infopeople class "Library Services for Patrons Experiencing Homelessness" (Winkelstein, 2019).

Planning: Services to community members experiencing homelessness should be an integral part of all library planning efforts. The library's mission, goals and objectives should specifically address services to these folks.

- Library director and library board are involved and committed to serving those experiencing homelessness.
- Services to community members experiencing homelessness are included in the library's long range/strategic plan.
- Library management and staff understand why serving community members experiencing homelessness is important.
- Library staff are provided opportunities to learn about the complex nature of homelessness, the challenges in addressing it, and customer service to community members experiencing homelessness.

- Library staff across all departments and classifications are involved in planning services to community members experiencing homelessness.
- Library has revised existing policies and procedures that impact delivery of services to community members experiencing homelessness.

Community Involvement/Connections: Responsive libraries are committed to being involved with community members experiencing homelessness. They make sure that community representatives are involved in the design and evaluation of library activities.

- Library staff meets with key community leaders and groups that represent community members experiencing homelessness on a regular basis, to review and revise the service plan.
- Library staff have identified public relations activities with which community leaders and groups from the community of those experiencing homelessness can assist.
- Library staff have participated in one or more events or programs related to homelessness.
- Library staff have developed a list of current and potential homelessness community partners and collaborators.
- Library staff have developed a process for tracking homelessness community connections made and a schedule for following up and staying in touch.
- A schedule/process is in place for library staff to participate in programs and services related to community members experiencing homelessness.

Facilitating Access and a Welcoming Environment: Access to library services by community members experiencing homelessness includes delivery systems and bibliographic processes that reflect the lives of all community members, including those who are experiencing homelessness.

- Signs directing people experiencing homelessness to the library can be found at shelters, food banks, free food services, churches, parks, schools, and other popular spots.
- Culturally sensitive posters, art and displays help create a welcoming environment.
- Library is open at hours convenient to all segments of the community.

Collection: The library's collection should reflect the needs, culture and lives of library patrons experiencing homelessness.

- A collection development policy related to homelessness and poverty has been written.
- Library has a schedule/process in place for ongoing community input to homelessness and poverty collection development.
- Relevant collection displays and materials are in areas where people gather in the library.

Programs/Services Offered: Effective services to community members experiencing homelessness must include a wide variety of programs that meet the specific needs and interests of the entire community.

- Programs/activities are offered in the library (e.g., finding and interviewing for a job; healthy eating on the streets; knowing your rights on the streets; how to apply for housing, etc.).

- Library programs/activities are offered in the community (e.g. library booth at a health or job fair for those experiencing homelessness, community events, visits to schools, speaking to concerned community groups, etc.).
- Staff is culturally responsive to those experiencing homelessness (e.g. eye contact, smiles, level of communications, offering their own names, respectful vocabulary).
- Additional activities of interest to those experiencing homelessness are available (other programs and/or grants).
- Methods for tracking programs and number of attendees are in place.
- Library delivers services in the community at local gathering spots for those experiencing homelessness (e.g. migrant camps, public parks, tent communities, emergency housing, food services, etc.).
- Library coordinates/collaborates library services/programs with other agencies working with community members experiencing homelessness.
- Library programs encourage/facilitate participation by community members experiencing homelessness.
- Library has schedule/process in place for ongoing input from community members experiencing homelessness.

Internal Communications: Effective libraries make sure that staff, volunteers, Friends and Trustees are informed and/or involved in the design and implementation of library plans to serve community members experiencing homelessness.

- Library staff, volunteers, Friends and Trustees are aware of the plan and its impact on library services, staffing, promotion and budget.

- Library staff, volunteers, Friends and Trustees have been asked for input on how to best to implement the plan.
- Contributions and achievements of staff and volunteers in helping to establish and implement the plan have been recognized.

Staff Recruitment and Development: Effective libraries actively recruit staff at all levels that mirror the demographics of community members who are unhoused. They provide encouragement and opportunities for staff to develop and update skills in serving community members experiencing homelessness.

- A schedule/process for providing cultural humility, person-centered and trauma-informed training for all staff is in place.
- A schedule/process for encouraging staff to participate in activities related to the lives of those who are unhoused, including paid work time for volunteer

Board Recruitment and Development: Effective libraries actively recruit board members who mirror the makeup of unhoused community members. They provide encouragement and opportunities for board members to develop and update skills in representing and serving community members who are experiencing homelessness.

- A process for recruiting board members who mirror the makeup of the homelessness community is in place.
- A schedule for providing training that includes cultural humility, person-centered interactions and trauma-informed care is in place.

Publicity and Media Relations: Effective libraries develop and maintain connections with media contacts and agencies that work with community members experiencing homelessness, as well

as the unhoused community members themselves. They monitor the impact of their marketing activities to the unhoused community members. They are also mindful of stereotypes and avoid them, replacing them with respectful and non-stigmatizing language and graphics.

- Library staff have developed a thorough list of social services and homelessness media contacts.
- Library staff have met with each homelessness media contact at least once to begin the relationship.
- Library staff, volunteers, Friends and Trustees are aware of homelessness promotional strategies.
- The library website includes content appropriate to the lives of those experiencing homelessness.

References

- Cuesta, Y. (2012). "Serving Spanish speaking communities success checklist." Retrieved from https://www.webjunction.org/materials/webjunction/Serving_Spanish_Speaking_Communities_Success_Checklist.html
- Winkelstein, J. A. (2019). "Library services for patrons experiencing homelessness." Retrieved <https://infopeople.org/content/infopeople-past-online-training>