How the Literacy Program Fits Into the Library Culture

Introduction

Library culture helps explain the organizational context of a literacy program. Culture includes the library's beliefs, attitudes, and role definitions and interactions. These components affect the way the literacy program is formed and how it operates once in existence. Indeed, one must recognize that all of the decisions made in an organization are culture bound; i.e., they are a reflection of all these components of culture. Library literacy coordinators must understand the culture of the library because the literacy program is affected by that culture. At the same time, the literacy program may also redefine the library's cultural values, norms, and role patterns.

In this Issue

This Tip Sheet first gives a rationale for considering the culture of the library while planning and implementing a literacy program. Then, advice is given to literacy coordinators on how to fit it into the culture of the library within a framework of key program structures and processes.

Taking a Systems Approach to Fit Into the Library Culture

Think of the library as an open system that interacts with its environment. In order to understand how the literacy program fits into the culture of the library, one must look at the full range of programming processes and structures. This is where the literacy program adds value to the library program as a whole. The literacy program must "fit in" with the overall culture of the library and, at the same time, it will make new demands on the library, impacting how things get done as well as what programs and services the library offers to patrons.

The inputs of the overall library system include the human resources, physical resources, financial resources, and information. The outputs include the product/service mix, customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction, employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction, public satisfaction/dissatisfaction, surplus or deficit, efficiency/inefficiency, wages and salaries, social benefits, and public reputation or image. The library also faces constraints such as the human resource skill/educational mix, cultural values and norms, legal structure, political system, economic system, state of technology, and time. The library literacy program must take these inputs, outputs, and constraints into account and consider when it is appropriate to either conform to these norms, or influence these inputs and outputs.

Most public libraries in Florida are administered by a professional librarian with a master's degree in Library Science. As part of their professional culture and values, most librarians believe that reading and information provide power, and they share the value that literacy services are central to a library's mission. They believe in intellectual freedom, no matter what other political opinions they have. Librarians are very resource-oriented, have collections to share, and are eager to provide information access to individuals and programs. Their roles have changed due to advances in technology. This technology can also help the literacy program grow their business and recruit more tutors and learners.

Florida Library Literacy Tip Sheet
State Library and Archives of Florida

How to Fit Into the Library Culture

In order to fit into the culture of the library, literacy coordinators should consider the inputs, outputs, and constraints of the library system while planning and implementing the literacy program. The following guidance is offered on how to fit into the library culture.

Mission Alignment
- Make sure the objectives of the literacy program support the mission and goals of the library.

Governance
- Include representation from key staff members on the literacy advisory board.

Budget
- Continuously market your literacy program within the library to secure funding for essential staffing and services within the library's budget at the earliest possible time, even during any startup grants you obtain.

Library Resources
- Secure program staff from the library to support the literacy program. Ideally, this would mean a staff person from each library outlet.
- Market the adult literacy collection of books and support materials to library staff.

Program Planning
- Build a solid base of support within the library during the planning, implementation, and evaluation of your program. Assure that the literacy plans fit into the library's long range plan and annual plan of service.
- Be clear about your own personal beliefs related to program planning and how these beliefs may fit in or conflict with the library's way of conducting business.
- Coordinate facilities and onsite events with library staff who may already have ongoing programs scheduled.

Internal Relations
- Market the literacy program to all the internal library stakeholders, including the board, the friends group, the staff, and the funding sources.
- Communicate the value of the program and report to key individuals and groups.

Community Relations

- Market the literacy program to all external library stakeholders, including the adult literacy students and their communities.
- Involve adult learners in program activities beyond tutoring.

To fit into the culture of the library means to fully integrate the literacy program into the library's beliefs, attitudes, and role definitions and interactions. This integration means a transparent alignment with the library's overall mission, governance, budget, resource allocation, programming, and marketing.

The following groups will support your efforts. Your program should become a member of ProLiteracy America (www.proliteracy.org), Literacy Florida! (www.literacyflorida.org), and Florida Literacy Coalition (www.floridaliteracy.org). The State of Florida also provides training, technical assistance, and grants for library sponsored programs.

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You may also visit http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/Literacy/BLD_literacy_index.html.