Ideabook
Libraries for Families

Leadership

Leaders—a library director, youth, or children's librarian—drive the vision and commitment to engage families in their children's learning from early childhood into and through young adulthood.

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About Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) separated from the Harvard Graduate School of Education to become the Global Family Research Project as of January 1, 2017 and is no longer affiliated with Harvard. HFRP worked to promote children's learning and development through family and community engagement by serving a diverse national audience that included policymakers, researchers, educators, and practitioners. Network building, documentation, policy analysis, evaluation, and professional development were core elements of HFRP's family engagement work.

About the Public Library Association

The Public Library Association (PLA) is the largest association dedicated to supporting the unique and evolving needs of public library professionals. Founded in 1944, PLA serves nearly 9,000 members in public libraries large and small in communities across the United States and Canada, with a growing presence around the world. PLA strives to help its members shape the essential institution of public libraries by serving as an indispensable ally for public library leaders.

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Part 1

Introduction

Libraries for Families*

- **Are you interested in engaging families to promote children's lifelong learning?**

- **Are you seeking inspiration to reach families?**

- **Are you wondering how to create new meaningful experiences for families within libraries?**

This IDEABOOK shows the way. This book:

- Offers a research-based framework to guide libraries' work in family engagement.

- Shares many innovative ways that libraries support and guide families in children's learning and development.

- Inspires libraries to create meaningful family engagement experiences.

- Creates a dialogue within and among libraries to bring about well-planned family engagement programs.

*Throughout the IDEABOOK, we use the term "family" in its broadest sense, defined as parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and any other caregivers who support children's growth and development. Similarly, the term library "staff" is used throughout to be inclusive. The term refers to professionals who are involved in library operations at many different levels, including librarians, library administration, management and programming, and other library staff.

Why Use This IDEABOOK

Libraries are no longer just about books—they are increasingly becoming the educational, technological, and social hub of communities across the nation.[1] Family engagement is a critical component of this evolution. Libraries are spaces where families can:

- Find training, resources, and support to meet their interests and needs.

- Acquire knowledge, mindsets, and confidence to support their children's learning from early childhood through adolescence.

- Connect with other families to build social networks.

This IDEABOOK will help librarians think about what they do with families in new ways. It will inspire fresh ideas and show how isolated activities can be part of a more intentional family engagement system. As explored in the companion publication, **Public Libraries: A Vital Space for Family Engagement**, the work libraries do can improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in a variety of areas, including brain development, language and literacy, reading abilities, mathematical skills, social and emotional learning, and literacy in a digital world.[2]

What We Know about Family Engagement

Many years of research point to the features of successful family engagement.

- **Family engagement is about building relationships with families.** It is not a specific curriculum or program. It is a way of meeting families where they are, and giving them opportunities to design how they would like to promote their children's learning and development from infancy through early adulthood. Family engagement can take different forms and happens anywhere, anytime children learn.

- **Family engagement builds on family strengths.** It recognizes that families have the knowledge, skills, and values that can contribute to making libraries better learning spaces for all. Just as families can learn from librarians, so, too, can librarians learn from families.

- **Family engagement is not a one-size-fits-all process.** Activities are tailored to community interests, resources, and needs, but also personalized for individual families.

- **Family engagement invites meaningful participation.** It offers learning experiences *with* rather than *for* families. It is not about teaching, but about creating family interactions through programs and services.

- **Family engagement is intentional.** It is planned and based on research following the core principles and practices that support meaningful and effective family engagement.

- **Family engagement is systemic.** The elements of leadership, engagement, and support function together to ensure libraries reach, serve, and involve families as partners in children's lifelong learning. As with any system, a change in one of these elements affects the others. Libraries are also embedded in a larger system of institutions that serve children, making community partnerships essential to library leadership.

What's Inside?

This IDEABOOK:

• Speaks to libraries that are big or small, well-resourced or strapped for funds, or in rural, suburban, or urban areas.

• Shares promising practices drawn from a national survey of public libraries, key informant interviews, documentary research, and conversations with librarians and parents.

• Provides examples of what libraries are doing.

• Offers a research framework to ground library practices.

• Seeks to inspire libraries with new ideas, but is not a prescribed list or set of practices.

There's an Idea for Everyone!

This IDEABOOK is filled with ideas for promoting family engagement in libraries. Some of these ideas are big and require a lot of resources, and some are small and require minimal effort and virtually no resources at all. Even the big ideas can be adapted to fit any library's needs. For example:

You'll read about…	But…	You can…
☑ A home visiting program that the Columbus Metropolitan Library (OH) developed to reinforce families' role in children's early learning at home (p. 28).	☑ Don't have resources to develop a home visiting program?	☑ Reach out to local home visiting programs and see if there is a way to team up or provide guidance to home visitors on what the library has to offer.
☑ How Carroll County Public Library (MD) holds library cafés to bring families together to connect and learn about resources in the community (p. 36).	☑ Don't have staff or space to start a library café?	☑ Connect parents in your program by simply taking three minutes at the start of story time to help parents build relationships or set up a small area—either online or in the library—where families can learn about community events.
☑ How the Plano Public Library System (TX) has adopted PLA Project Outcome to track family satisfaction, engagement, and outcomes for a digital media focused family engagement program (p. 21).	☑ Don't have capacity to collect and analyze pre- and post-surveys?	☑ Hold focus groups with families periodically or add a suggestion box with survey forms at circulation desks.

A Framework to Guide Practice: Moving beyond Random Acts

At the core of this IDEABOOK is a framework to guide and broaden family engagement in libraries. The framework, illustrated on page 11, helps libraries move beyond thinking of family engagement as random, individual activities or programs cobbled together. Family engagement is not a collection of separate, siloed activities, but rather it is a well-working system with library leadership, activities, and resources that are linked to goals. In addition, libraries are linked to other systems that reach children and families, such as early childhood programs, schools, health centers, and afterschool and youth-serving agencies.

A car, for example, is composed of many parts— an engine, transmission, brakes, body, and so forth—but it is more than any one of them. The parts of a car have to connect and work together as a whole to function. Furthermore, a car operates in an environment of roads, regulations, other types of vehicles, and in a diversity of settings, such as urban and rural roadways. All of these affect how and when drivers reach their destination. In a similar way, implementing family engagement is about making the elements and practices function together so that families' library experiences inspire and motivate them to take an active role in children's learning.

The framework represents a theory of change that begins with a set of elements—leadership, engagement, and support services—that build a pathway for family engagement beginning in the early childhood years and extending through young adulthood.

• **Leadership** is the commitment of everyone within the library to support family engagement. This means creating possibility for family engagement, expanding programs and services within the library, working in partnership with other community organizations, and being dedicated to continuous improvement. Leadership also means building professional capacity for family engagement, securing resources, and ensuring that all families have equitable access to and use of library resources.

• **Engagement** is a process with many parts: reaching out to families, raising up their voices, reinforcing family actions to support learning, helping families relate to one another, and reimagining partnerships to support family engagement.

• **Support** services involve the collections, technology, and physical spaces, both within and outside the library, that make family engagement happen.

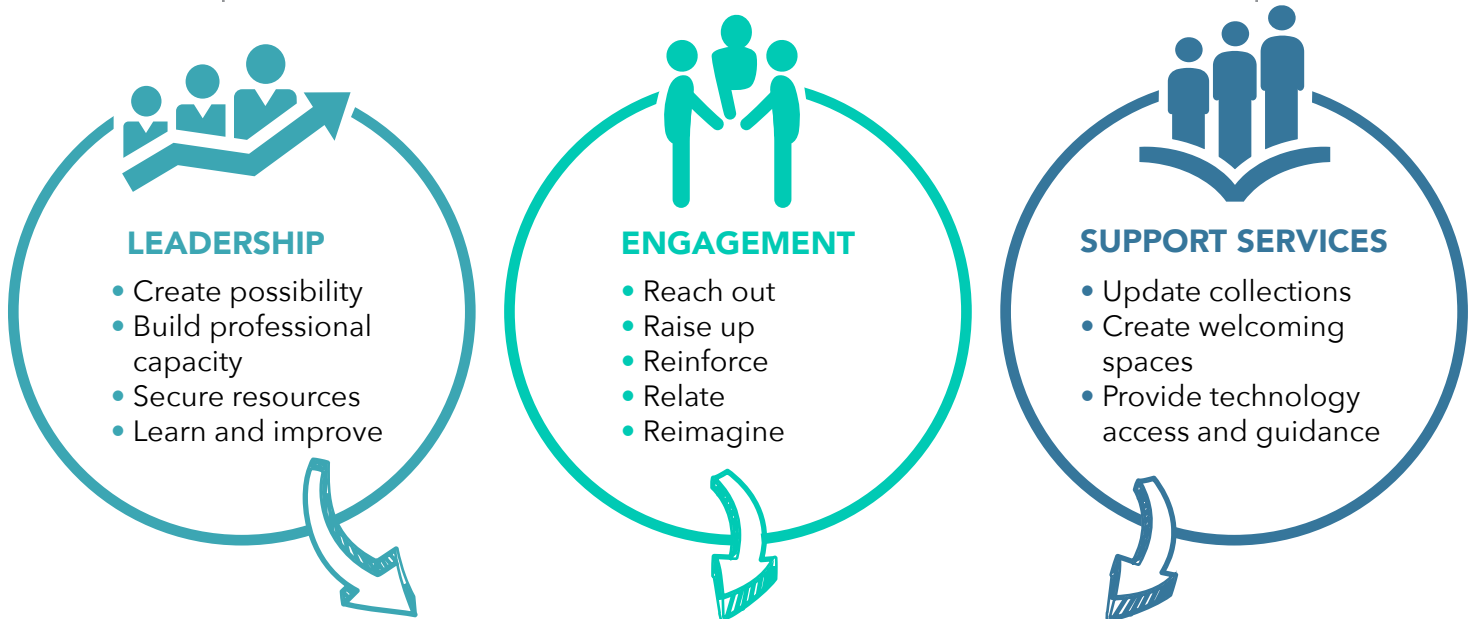These elements are meant to lead to the following outcomes:

• **Library Outcomes:** When family engagement practices are reflected in libraries' leadership, engagement, and support services, a coherent system begins to form that changes the culture and environment within the library. Libraries have greater capacity to work with families, have funds to support family-oriented programs and services, and begin to use data to improve programs and services. They enjoy improved relationships with families, and they have spaces and collections that are welcoming and accessible.

• **Family Outcomes:** When a library culture is inclusive and welcoming to all, families become more connected to their libraries, have more knowledge about available resources, and increase their library use. Families develop relationships with other families in the community and find resources that promote family health and well-being. Families also gain knowledge, parenting skills, and confidence to support children's learning, enjoying more positive interactions with their children. Being part of a library can transform families into advocates for their children, their community, and especially the library.

• **Child Outcomes:** The ultimate reason for engaging families in libraries is to support children's development and set them on a pathway for lifelong learning. Although child outcomes may be hard to measure or immediately see, family engagement in libraries can lead to children having more positive experiences with their families, being better prepared for school, feeling more supported with their schoolwork, and having improved skills to follow their interests, curiosities, and learning needs.

A Framework to Support Family Engagement in Children's Learning through Libraries

LIBRARY ELEMENTS
TO SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP
- Create possibility
- Build professional capacity
- Secure resources
- Learn and improve

ENGAGEMENT
- Reach out
- Raise up
- Reinforce
- Relate
- Reimagine

SUPPORT SERVICES
- Update collections
- Create welcoming spaces
- Provide technology access and guidance

OUTCOMES

LIBRARIES WILL:
- Increase outreach to underserved families
- Elevate family voice and perspectives in designing services
- Facilitate peer-to-peer interactions
- Build family engagement pathways from early childhood through young adulthood
- Increase partnerships with community agencies
- Provide spaces that promote family interaction

FAMILIES WILL:
- Be more knowledgeable about library resources
- Improve their health, well-being, and positive parenting practices
- Be more connected to peers in the community
- Increase their knowledge, skills, and confidence to support children's learning
- Improve their ability to advocate for their community and the library
- Be more knowledgeable about how to access community resources

CHILDREN WILL:
- Be more prepared for school
- Have more support with their school work
- Improve their skills to fulfill their interests
- Be on a pathway to lifelong learning
- Experience positive interactions with their families

How to Use the IDEABOOK

This IDEABOOK is meant for anyone who works in a library setting—from library directors and children's and youth librarians, to volunteers and support staff. The book is not meant to be read all at once, but instead to be used as a continuing resource for designing a family engagement system.

Library staff can:

- Use the At-A-Glance section on p. 13 to quickly find topics of interest.

- Read sections in Part Two to learn more about the framework elements that promote family engagement; leadership, engagement, and support services.

- Explore the ideas profiled in Part Two to get inspired to try out something new.

- Reflect on recommendations throughout Part Two about implementing the framework elements.

- Learn how library systems are putting together all of the elements of the framework through the case studies in Part Three.

- Make a big leap ahead and read the conclusion in Part Four, which offers five forward-looking action steps.

Ideas At-A-Glance

The IDEABOOK contains fifty-four profiles organized by the element of the family engagement system they illustrate. However, the topics can also be organized in different ways. Here are some profile categories identified for easy reference.

Family Engagement in Small and Rural Libraries

- David & Joyce Milne Public Library, MA (p. 26)
- Homer Public Library, AK (p. 48)
- Ignacio Public Library, CO (p. 19)
- Milbridge Public Library, ME (p. 26)
- Richfield Public Library, UT (p. 42)

Family Engagement for School-Age Children and Youth via Afterschool and Summer Learning Experiences

- Baltimore County Public Library, MD (p. 32)
- Carroll County Public Library, MD (p. 36)
- Contra Costa County Library, CA (p. 37)
- Cuyahoga County Public Library, OH (p. 32 & 35)
- Denver Public Library, CO (p. 44)
- Martin Library, PA (p. 37)
- Nashville Public Library, TN (p. 17)
- Queens Library, NY (p. 31)
- Sunnyvale Public Library, CA (p. 33)
- Warren-Trumbull County Public Library, OH (p. 20)

Family Engagement and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

- Contra Costa County Library, CA (p. 37)
- Denver Public Library, CO (p. 44)
- New Brunswick Free Public Library, NJ (p 28)
- Pierce County Library System, WA (p.22)
- Scottsdale Public Library, AZ (p. 21)
- Sunnyvale Public Library, CA (p. 33)

Family Engagement and Digital Media

- Allen County Public Library, IN (p. 48)
- Bensenville Community Public Library, IL (p. 34)
- Brooklyn Public Library, NY (p. 29)
- Homer Public Library, AK (p. 48)
- Madison Public Library, WI (p. 49)
- Plano Public Library System, TX (p. 21)

Family Strengthening and Support

- Birmingham Public Library, AL (p. 16)
- Carroll County Public Library, MD (p. 36)
- Cleveland Public Library, OH (p. 17)
- D.C. Public Library, D.C. (p. 24)
- Denver Public Library, CO (p. 34)
- Houston Public Library, TX (p. 40)
- Jacksonville Public Library, FL (p. 34)
- Pima County Public Library, AZ (p. 39)
- San Mateo County Libraries, CA (p. 36)
- Watertown Free Public Library, MA (p. 36)
- Waukegan Public Library,IL (p. 16 & 24)

Part 2

The Ideas

Leadership

Leaders—including library directors and youth or children's librarians—drive the vision and commitment to engage families in children's learning, from early childhood through young adulthood.

Leaders:

- Create possibility.
- Build professional capacity.
- Secure resources.
- Use data to learn and improve.

Leadership

Create Possibility

What: Library leaders develop a vision that puts families at the forefront of library services. Leaders make it their mission to promote equity by transforming library practices and forming solid community partnerships to meet the needs of all families.

Why: Much of what influences children's academic and social achievement happens before children enter school and outside of school hours. Because of this, families are an important contributor to children's learning. Leaders who adopt a family-centered vision develop an intergenerational, or two-generation, way of thinking. They understand that while children need high-quality learning experiences, parents also need support to meet their own educational and learning needs. Families need knowledge, skills, and confidence to guide children's learning. Libraries realize there are disparities in the extent to which families are able to access high-quality out-of-school experiences for their children, driven largely by economic status. Libraries help these families thrive by giving them easy access to resources and information and developing services that meet their particular needs.

Ideas in Action:

Putting Families First

Nineteen percent of children and youth in Waukegan (IL) live in poverty and over half of the population identifies as Hispanic—a recent demographic shift for the region. The **Waukegan Public Library** responded by developing a strategic plan, based on a community needs assessment, that put families at the forefront of children's learning. The library sets specific goals to guide parents as their children's first teacher, promote parents' use of library resources and technology, and support their children's learning over the summer. To meet these goals, the library offers:

• Bilingual story times for young children and their families, and bilingual, literacy-based sessions for children ages four to seven.

• Support for healthy families, including helping them to enroll in the Affordable Care Act and offering courses on how to eat healthy.

• Resources to improve the lives of their patrons, such as courses for earning a GED, passing the U.S. naturalization test, and acquiring a Temporary Visitor Driver's License.

• Family-oriented bilingual education, where children learn English through stories, music, games, and activities while their parents participate in language and conversational classes.

Raising Awareness That Libraries Are Intergenerational

With the revitalization of the city of Birmingham (AL), leaders within the **Birmingham Public Library** have made it their priority to ensure that the public knows and understands the new role of libraries—not only in providing resources for reading and enjoyment but also for providing life skills to adults and children as an extension of the school system. For example, some library branches hold classes for parents and children ages birth to three on playful learning experiences. For families and children ages three to ten, library branches offer the interactive PRIME TIME Family Reading Program, and for teens, the library holds family workshops on a variety of topics, including financial aid and scholarships for college. The library offers adult-focused workshops on topics such as business development and computer skills, and in partnership with a community organization, social workers use the library space to assist patrons experiencing homelessness access resources they otherwise would not have. All services serve as a catalyst for families to connect and form friendships with one another.

Leadership

Taking Responsibility to Make Families' Lives Better

With more than half of all children in Cleveland living in poverty, the **Cleveland Public Library** (OH) has become the center of a movement to make families' lives better. The library organizes a variety of programs and community partnerships to ensure that families, including young children, youth, siblings, parents, and grandparents, get the support they need to help prepare their children for school and beyond. To build librarians' empathy and understanding of families, librarians participate in the Community Action Poverty Simulation, offered by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. The simulation focuses on the experiences of individuals going from one public agency to another, trying to gain access to resources. After the role-play, librarians discuss how the library should not be another bureaucracy but rather an institution that builds up people and communities. In this way librarians learn to build nonjudgmental relationships so that families are drawn to the library.

Sponsoring Community Programs

In 2014, the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA)—a system of free, high-quality afterschool programs that provide academic support and creative outlets for Metro Nashville Public Schools' middle-school students—became part of the **Nashville Public Library** (TN). Previously under the umbrella of the mayor's office, NAZA moved to the library to ensure the program's sustainability and to provide avenues to bring the library's vast literacy resources to the NAZA afterschool sites. This partnership is a lifeline for parents. Studies show that afterschool programs are important because they are spaces that families rely on while they are at work to keep children safe, inspire students to learn, serve as a source of support and comfort, and help parents be more productive at work and keep their jobs. By becoming a home for NAZA, the library has elevated its role in the community and ensures that its collections and space are well utilized. For example, NAZA successfully develops partnerships with other children and teen services in the library, like Limitless Libraries, Bringing Books to Life, and Studio NPL, that enrich the learning experiences of children and youth.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Make a point to be at the table of various initiatives that support children and families.

☑ Share your vision with the community by writing op-eds in the local paper, maintaining a blog, and posting the vision in various locations and on the library website.

☑ Look at current library services or programs offered (e.g., afterschool homework programs, GED programs, digital support, etc.) and ask, "How can my library engage families in this activity?"

☑ Examine library policies with administrators, governing bodies, and library boards, and explore how some policies and practices might unintentionally put up barriers and discourage family engagement.

Build Professional Capacity

What: Library leaders commit to hiring, training, and coaching library professionals so that they can serve all families.

Why: It is important for librarians to understand child development and learn and practice family engagement skills on an ongoing basis, because strong family engagement matters for children's lifelong learning and families' well-being. When librarians enjoy trusting relationships with families, they can experience greater job satisfaction. A national survey of family engagement practices shows that librarians' top-three family engagement training needs are: making the library a welcoming space for families; helping families feel confident in supporting children's learning and development, and supporting families' use of technology to enhance children's learning.

Ideas in Action:

Building from Every Child Ready to Read

As part of a larger statewide initiative, all children's librarians in the **King County Library System** (WA) are trained to use Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR). Developed by the PLA and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), ECRR is a research-based curriculum and resource guide for librarians to support families in nurturing their young children's literacy development. In King County, ECRR has not only become an important tool to build librarians' and families' knowledge around promoting early literacy, but it has become the foundation through which librarians expand literacy training among community partners. For example, librarians use principles of ECRR to train grandparents and childcare providers. Librarians also train linguistically diverse community members who speak languages such as Spanish, Somali, Japanese, and Mandarin on the principles of ECRR so that they can lead bilingual story time sessions and spread information to families that the library might not otherwise reach due to language barriers.

> "Libraries have always been the institution to better people's lives. For many years libraries only had books, but now we have many more resources. There is an expectation that any organization that can help should help. We as libraries can help parents become better advocates for their children.
>
> **—Felton Thomas, Cleveland Public Library (OH)**

Leadership

Making the Library a Family Place

Joplin Public Library (MO) has benefited from the professional development and capacity-building strategies of the Family Place Libraries' approach to family engagement. Family Place Libraries is a nationwide network of librarians trained to build on the knowledge that good health, early learning, parental involvement, and supportive communities play a critical role in young children's growth and development. At Joplin Public Library, children's librarians were knowledgeable about library science but had little formal training in how to make programming for families and their young children developmentally appropriate. As a result of the Family Place training, librarians became more aware of children's development and more confident in how to transform physical spaces to meet young children's needs and provide more opportunities for hands-on activities. Funds for the training came from a career development grant offered by the Missouri State Library as well as a grant from a local family foundation.

Providing Ongoing Training and Coaching in Supporting Families

For the **Ignacio Community Library** (CO), a small rural library located within the boundaries of the Southern Ute Reservation, connecting with families is everybody's job. Library staff consistently think and talk about what they can do to make families feel welcome. Senior librarians train novice staff on what to do and say when families come into the library, for example, by asking, "How can I help you?" Staff use

"cheat sheets" that include question prompts and a list of current events to promote conversations with families. Librarians also work together regularly to develop strategies for handling sensitive information that families may disclose, such as homelessness, mental health concerns, or addiction issues. They brainstorm to find available community resources and supports they can refer families to when circumstances warrant.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Integrate family engagement topics into meetings, workshops, and other ongoing professional learning opportunities so that librarians have a chance to reflect about their work with families.

☑ Recruit and retain librarians who represent the diversity of the community.

☑ Invite local child development and literacy experts to talk with staff about the most pressing challenges families face, such as poverty, homelessness, and mental health.

> " We train our youth services staff in the whys and hows of working with families. When staff understand why we do what we do, and how it affects the families who visit, it results in them becoming purposeful advocates for the library. "
>
> **—Susan Mankowski, Jacksonville Public Library (FL)**

Leadership

Secure Resources

What: Library leaders obtain local, state, and federal resources to implement and sustain their family engagement practices.

Why: Most libraries receive the majority of their funding through property taxes or local tax funding, from which funds can be used for a variety of family engagement services and practices. Many libraries also raise additional funds to support their family engagement initiatives—through grants, fundraisers, collaborating and pooling resources with other libraries and community organizations, and community volunteers.

Ideas in Action:

Finding Sponsors

The **New Orleans Public Library** (LA) has been creative about securing supplemental funding for its family engagement programs. For example, a local author donated book royalties to help fund one of its signature family programs, Born to Read. The program provides new parents at a local birthing center a bag with an organic toy, library information, and a book. Small grants from community businesses and foundations also supplement a variety of services and activities, including an intergenerational family literacy program.

Staffing Programs with Community Volunteers

When parents from **Warren-Trumbull County Public Library** (OH) approached librarians seeking ways to help their children in first through fourth grades improve their reading skills, the Book Buddies program was born. The Youth Services department collaborated with two English professors at Kent State University's Trumbull Campus to recruit college students to provide one-to-one literacy sessions. The college students received school credit for their volunteer tutoring services. When the collaboration with the university ended, families, students, and librarians worked to sustain the program. The librarians turned to a group of library patrons with time to commit to children's literacy—retired grandparents. Today, the program is staffed mainly by senior citizens as a part of the Foster Grandparent Program.

Seeking Statewide Funds

The **Cambridge Public Library** (MA) is designated as the Greater Boston Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC), one of five in the state. Funded by a three-year grant from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the library's ECRC

materials are available statewide to families with a current library card. A special section of the children's room at the library, funded with the grant, offers parents, caregivers, and educators books, materials, and other resources relating to early learning. Families can also have materials delivered to their local library. The Greater Boston ECRC hosts various workshops and programs throughout the year, with a focus on families and caregivers of children, birth through age eight. The partnership provides the library additional funding as well as firsthand information about broader policies and concerns throughout the state related to families and early childhood.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Invite volunteers (e.g., college students, seniors) to help run library programs.

☑ Sign up for grant alerts and seek out local and state-wide grants that might offer an additional source of funding for family engagement.

☑ Partner with other libraries to find ways to rotate collections or exhibits that might engage families.

☑ Use crowdfunding platforms to get creative ideas and projects off the ground.

Use Data to Learn and Improve

What: Library leaders collect and use data to better understand the results of their work with children and families.

Why: Data can shine a light on how libraries are serving families and help troubleshoot problems as they arise rather than waiting until the end of a program to realize that something did not go as planned. Data will also ultimately demonstrate whether and how library services are having a positive impact on families' and children's lives. Libraries that use data well develop a culture that values inquiry, exploration, and self-examination. They engage all staff in organizing, sharing, and reflecting on data and thus support informed decision making. Using data to learn and improve can be challenging. However, a variety of resources are increasingly available to assist in this work. For example, the PLA Project Outcome system is a new data management platform that many libraries are adopting to support them in tracking and measuring outcomes.

Ideas in Action:

Using Data to Improve Family Experiences

The **Plano Public Library System** (TX) offers a wide variety of programs. To evaluate the most effective services, the library system uses PLA Project Outcome surveys and online data system. For example, App Time is an early literacy program that emphasizes for families how digital media, apps, and technology can be used to support children's learning. The program began at one branch library through a grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, and was later instituted at a second location without the grant funding. While librarians at the grant-funded site were required to follow specific curriculum guidelines, the librarians at the second site (without the grant funding) had opportunities to integrate ideas for using digital media with more traditional story time elements, such as reading print-based books and singing songs. Programs in the second location had higher attendance and library administrators wanted to understand why. Follow-up surveys showed that families from the grant-funded site felt that the program lacked the traditional story time elements. In response, the library reintroduced App Time with more traditional story time activities. Families in both locations emphasized that they wanted apps in multiple languages. Consequently, the two participating libraries now conduct App Time in Hindi and Spanish, and programs in other languages are in development.

Hiring Outside Evaluators

Scottsdale Public Library (AZ) has partnered with researchers from Arizona State University to evaluate two of its programs designed to promote children's school readiness and families' abilities to support children's learning. Books Can. . .is a program for children ages birth to four and their parents that fosters young children's social and emotional learning, while Fun With Math and Science (ages three to five) focuses on supporting young children's math and science learning. By bringing in researchers, the library hopes to: improve the quality of its programming, better understand the impact of its work on participants, and better understand how the programming is changing families' knowledge and skills. To evaluate both programs' effectiveness, researchers have conducted pre- and postsurveys and videotaped program sessions. The data are used to assess the quality of parent-child interactions, consistency in program delivery, and the competency of facilitators. Continued efforts in this area will focus on supporting library youth staff through the development of effective training and professional development.

Leadership

Collaborating with Data

Public libraries are well positioned to use state and local data to inform their efforts to support family engagement and children's learning. For example, after reviewing statewide performance data, **Pierce County Library System** (WA) librarians, in collaboration with early childhood and school partners, began to think more critically about how to support children and families in regions with below-average scores on state tests. Based on data suggesting that students needed additional math support, the library system has begun to deliberately integrate math concepts into story time hours, and has developed, in partnership with the local educational district, a program to promote block play among young children. Librarians and teachers in Head Start and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program receive training in block play, and once each month, classroom children visit the library for an extended block play period and story time. Children also receive a free set of wooden blocks to use at home along with a free book each visit, and families are encouraged to participate in open block-play sessions at the library. Results show that children's mathematical competencies are improving, along with their literacy levels.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Have staff review data reports to guide decision making based on information rather than hunches.

☑ Talk with faculty at nearby universities to see how they could partner or assist in evaluation and research projects.

☑ Join the PLA Project Outcome initiative and work with others to refine outcome measures for family engagement.

> " Social justice is becoming a very important theme that is driving and informing the work of public libraries. We may not be able to provide direct services to the public that address some of their most immediate needs, but this is an opportunity to go to those agencies that are providing those services and see what we can do to help those service providers and partner with them. "
>
> —Susan Hildreth, University of Washington Information School (WA)

Engagement: The Five Rs

Family engagement is about relationships and begins with reaching out to all families in a community.

- **Reach out:** Libraries reach out to families, especially those in special circumstances, to promote the programs, collections, and services that are vital in a knowledge economy.

- **Raise up:** Libraries elevate family perspectives to develop and improve programs and services.

- **Reinforce:** Libraries guide and model the specific actions that family members can take to support learning, from birth through young adulthood.

- **Relate:** Libraries offer opportunities for families to build peer-to-peer relationships and increase social networks.

- **Reimagine:** Libraries expand their community partnerships to reimagine ecologies of learning and how to support healthy children and families.

Reach Out

What: Libraries reach out to families, especially those in special circumstances, to promote the programs, collections, and services that are vital in a knowledge economy.

Why: Families are more likely to become engaged in their children's learning when staff reach out to them. This is especially true for families who are isolated from community resources and social networks, such as those experiencing homelessness, the incarceration of a loved one, poverty, or challenges related to immigration. Reaching out is also critical because there are troubling disparities–based on ethnicity, race, and class–in families' access to the resources and opportunities that promote learning. Libraries are free, trusted community anchors that can help alleviate these gaps, but to do this, libraries must make deliberate efforts to ensure that services extend to those families who might benefit from them the most.

Ideas in Action:

Using Trusted Community Members as Library Ambassadors

At **Waukegan Public Library** (IL), library ambassadors—or promotoras—actively reach out to Latino families in the community. Many of these families had shied away from the library, regarding it as only for affluent professionals and academics. Promotoras are active and trusted community members, such as church leaders or community organization workers, who are trained to visit homes in the community to talk with Latino families about their successes and the barriers they face. Promotoras then talk with families about the role of libraries in U.S. society and connect families to a library staff member, service, or program that can address their needs. This process also helps library staff start new activities based on community input.

Reaching Out to Incarcerated Youth, Adults, and their Families

The **D.C. Public Library** has created a variety of ways to reach out to families who are facing challenges associated with incarceration. In partnership with the D.C. Department of Corrections, the D.C. Public Library has opened a new library in the city jail where inmates can borrow books and study guides. The library has also made it easier for inmates and families to stay connected with one another by setting up a video visitation station at two of D.C.'s libraries. This allows families the ability to virtually visit with their loved ones in jail without having to travel far from home. Finally, the library has developed programs to help inmates returning to society gain important literacy and digital media skills. These new programs complement the library's current educational offerings, which include a variety of computer classes, adult literacy courses, and job-search assistance.

Taking the Library Out on the Road

The **Rochester Hills Public Library** (MI) serves families from predominantly upper-income homes, yet many families who live outside the center of the suburb are geographically isolated, struggle to make ends meet financially, and lack transportation to visit the library on a consistent basis. For over ten years, the library's Community Bookmobile has been reaching out to these underserved families. Each week the Bookmobile makes twenty-seven regularly scheduled one-hour stops, and provides children and families a chance to check out books, DVDs, music, and Wi-Fi hot-spot devices. Through a partnership with a food program, the bookmobile also makes backpacks filled with food available to eligible children and families over the summer months so that children do not go hungry when school is out.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Encourage families who use the library frequently to spread the word about the services available.

☑ Go outside the library walls and provide services and programs in places where families you want to reach reside or visit.

☑ Learn what library means among different ethnic and immigrant groups in your community.

> "Some parents in poor neighborhoods have literacy challenges themselves. A library can be intimidating. If you build trust and confidence with parents, and approach them little by little, they will get involved. After a short period of time, you will see parents walk up to library staff and ask for help because of that trust. For them to go up and ask library staff about the GED or help in reading—it's a huge compliment to what staff in libraries are doing.
>
> **—Al Reynolds, Literacy Inc (NY)**

Raise Up

What: Libraries elevate family perspectives to develop and improve programs and services.

Why: Families have important feedback and input for libraries. By asking for, listening to, and responding to family members' views, libraries empower families and improve library services. Two promising approaches to raising family voices have emerged. With the "funds of knowledge" approach, libraries actively seek to uncover and lift up the strengths of families in the community and integrate those strengths into library services and programs. With the human-centered design thinking approach, libraries seek out the perspective of families in the community in order to better understand families' experiences, hopes, desires, and frustrations. This understanding leads to services that better fit what parents want.

Ideas in Action:

Responding to Families' Ideas for Programming

A group of parents with young children approached the **David & Joyce Milne Public Library** in Williamstown (MA) about providing a bilingual story time. The librarians knew they did not have the resources, particularly a Spanish-speaking librarian, to do this, but they listened seriously to the parents' request. After a few discussions, the librarians gave the parents the go-ahead to take charge of creating and running a new bilingual story time program. Today, the library has a highly successful—and very well attended— Spanish story time, run almost completely by parents in the community. The program has resulted in some unintended, but welcome, consequences: Spanish-speaking families in the community who had never felt the library had relevant programming for their families have begun to participate. One librarian says, "It's great that when we don't have the skills and resources, [parents] can make it happen and bring brand-new families into the library."

Building Collections Based on Families' Interests

Milbridge is a small coastal town in rural Maine that in recent years has seen a growing Latino migrant-labor population. Although families knew that the **Milbridge Public Library** was an important institution in the community, very few spent time there, mainly because there was a lack of books for adults and children in Spanish. To fill this gap, parents who were part of the Comienza en Casa | It Starts at Home project, in collaboration with an AmeriCorps volunteer, organized a Children's Day fundraiser for the library. Money from the fundraiser was used to purchase Spanish books and magazines that families wanted for children and adults. Once the books arrived, the library threw a "processing party." Ten Spanish-speaking families from the community came to the library and helped to sort the books by category, placed Dewey Decimal numbers on them, and entered them into the catalog system so that they could be ready for lending. The process resulted in families feeling ownership over the collection and increased utilization of library books and services.

Using Design Thinking to Raise Up the Family Perspective

Human-centered design thinking is an approach that opens new possibilities for how libraries can partner with families. The approach involves asking librarians to put themselves in families' shoes and to develop and refine services from the family perspective. Child Services librarians at the **Watertown Free Public Library** (MA) used this approach to reimagine how families with very young children experience story time. To understand families' needs and feelings, librarians observed a story time for children ages birth through twelve months, and then talked with families about why they come to the library, what they like, and what improvements they would like to see. After the observations and interviews, librarians synthesized their notes, discussed family needs, and brainstormed ideas for how to meet them. From listening and raising up families' voices, librarians became more aware of how families with young children need to feel connected to other parents with new babies and have a way to get and share information in nonjudgmental settings. Librarians are now planning to dedicate a portion of their story time sessions to a collective conversation among families about questions they have, such as when babies can change car seats and the best foods for babies to try first.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Provide a "suggestions" or "tips" box in the library to solicit families' ideas, insights, and feedback.

☑ Conduct a family and community needs assessment to better understand families' interests.

☑ Include families on planning teams and leadership advisory committees so that services for families, collections, and spaces are cocreated with them.

☑ Talk with families as they come in and out of the library. Find out about their experiences, desires, hopes, and fears, and use this feedback to think about new ways of doing things.

Reinforce: The Early Years

What: Libraries guide and model the specific actions that families can take to support young children's learning, reaffirming families' important roles as children's first teachers.

Why: Families matter for ensuring that young children are prepared to learn, are socially competent, develop positive growth mindsets, and are lifelong learners. The bold and innovative Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) program has brought the importance of family engagement in early literacy to the forefront. Building from this initiative, libraries are seeking to reinforce parent-child activities that promote learning by:

- Modeling reading strategies through literacy programs and home visits.

- Creating interest in early math and science awareness.

- Using digital media to send parents ideas they can use to promote learning throughout their day.

Ideas in Action:

Conducting Home Visits

Columbus Metropolitan Library (OH) has taken to heart the idea of parents as a child's first teacher through the Ready to Read Home Visitation program. Through the program, librarians conduct monthly home visits with parents of children birth to age five. Using a new book each month, librarians show parents strategies to promote a child's phonological awareness, narrative skills, vocabulary, and print knowledge. After the visit, the parent and child get to keep their book. During the program's inaugural year, 397 parents and 548 children were enrolled. Based on evaluation results, the program increased parental knowledge of early literacy behaviors and boosted parental capacity to engage in literacy behaviors with their child. Children receiving twelve visits performed almost as well on a prereading assessment as comparison children attending a daily preschool program.

Having Fun with Math and Science

In partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research, the **New Brunswick Free Public Library** (NJ) offers Math and Science Story Time, a library-based bilingual story and activity series for young children and their families. The program, in its fifth year, aims to get preschool-age children and their families excited about science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Participants listen to stories, do gross motor activities, sing songs, and explore hands-on activities with a mathematical and science focus. The library holds the sessions in the summer evenings and intentionally reaches out to families raising dual language learners. After each session, parents are given research-based tip sheets in Spanish and English along with a free book to keep so that they can practice the ideas and skills they've learned in the library at home.

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Exploring Text Messaging

Inspired by research showing that sending text messages to parents with ideas for literacy activities can increase preschool children's skills, the **Brooklyn Public Library** (NY) began an early literacy texting initiative for parents enrolled in their Ready, Set, Kindergarten! Program. Text messages include follow-up ideas that parents can use to promote learning at home as well as encourage regular program attendance. Messages are sent to parents once a week at convenient times that allow them to put the ideas into practice, such as in the evening or over the weekend. Due to the success of Ready, Set, Kindergarten!, the library has added a texting service for parents and caregivers of children birth to age three to support early literacy programs with babies and toddlers.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Team up with local home visiting programs.

☑ Use text messaging and other digital media tools to show how parents can reinforce learning in the home and community.

☑ Integrate STEM activities into existing programs for families with young children.

> "Staff members in the Early Learning epartment, as well as staff throughout the system, are really dedicated to getting out into the community and focusing on family engagement and helping parents and caregivers understand what it takes to get kids ready for kindergarten. Staff work with parents and caregivers in workshops as well as informally meeting people where they are–from festivals and fairs to farmers' markets, public housing, and community centers where families gather.
>
> –Michelle Jeske, Denver Public Library (CO)

Reinforce: The Transition to School

What: Libraries become part of community-wide efforts to support children and families during the transition to school.

Why: Libraries are a trusted community space that can play a major role in the transition to school—particularly for those children without formal early childhood education experiences. Children who experience smooth transitions, and have parents who are part of the process, are more likely to experience academic and social success during the kindergarten year and beyond. High-quality transition activities are particularly effective in bolstering academic achievement for those children who are most at risk for school failure. During the transition, families need information about their children's development and kindergarten expectations, how to navigate the new school system, and how to support children's learning before, during, and after kindergarten.

Ideas in Action:

Promoting Kindergarten Readiness and Registration

The **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh** (PA) works in partnership with Ready Freddy, a program from the University of Pittsburgh that brings together Pittsburgh Public Schools, parent leaders, and community partners to promote kindergarten enrollment, transition, and school readiness. Beginning in late winter, the libraries host a weekly story time session with a focus on the transition to kindergarten. Guided by librarians, families read books, sing songs, and get involved in various other activities to ease children into the routine, daily activities, and expectations of kindergarten. Librarians are also part of citywide transition teams, and knock on doors in the community to remind parents about kindergarten registration and help them complete registration forms.

Supporting Spanish-Speaking Families

In response to data showing that only 36 percent of Spanish-speaking children in Minneapolis are ready for school, **Hennepin County Library** (MN) started a comprehensive ten-week-long kindergarten readiness and early Spanish literacy program called Súper Kínder. The intergenerational program is designed by librarians and a local kindergarten teacher for Spanish-speaking families. Teen assistants engage children in reading, math, and social skill development while parents meet to talk with a librarian about the day's learning activities. Children then join their parents who implement the lesson plan of the day. Over the past four years, librarians have seen increased use of the library by Súper Kínder families, including program attendance and checking out books. In addition, pre- and postsurvey results reveal that parents who participate in the program express broader and more actionable ideas about how to become leaders in their child's education, both at home and at school.

Building Family Engagement Pathways before, into, and after Kindergarten

The South Jamaica branch of the **Queens Library** (NY) serves as the anchor institution of a community-wide literacy initiative with the collective goal of getting all children reading on grade level. Funded by the Pinkerton Foundation, the initiative brings together schools and organizations that serve families with children from birth through fifth grade including home visiting, mentoring, tutoring, summer learning, and parent leadership development programs. A number of the programs also provide services that span across age ranges and community organizations. For example, a Family Academy offers parents and children opportunities to explore important topics together, such as test anxiety. Further, through the literacy "passport" program, when parents attend family activities and literacy events with their children, they earn stickers for their passport, which entitles them to discounts at more than thirty participating community businesses. By supporting families and children before they enter kindergarten, and through their early elementary years, and beyond, the library has been the fulcrum for creating a community culture of reading.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Hang signs throughout the library reminding families about kindergarten registration and forms they need to submit.

☑ Partner with early childhood programs, schools, and other community learning spaces to create transition teams.

☑ Talk with families about kindergarten expectations and what they can do at home to support learning.

☑ Invite kindergarten teachers to participate in story times and other early literacy events at the library.

☑ Create kindergarten-focused programming for those children who do not participate in formal early childhood programs.

Reinforce: School-Age Children and Youth

What: Libraries are exploring ways to develop family-oriented learning activities for school-age children.

Why: Families remain a critical support for their children's healthy growth and development throughout childhood and adolescence. Youth thrive when they have safe, trusting, and caring relationships with their parents, who simultaneously acknowledge their children's need for increasing autonomy. Families support youth by having high expectations for them and connecting them to learning settings outside of school where they can explore their interests. Libraries can reinforce families' roles in youth development by giving families and youth opportunities to learn and accomplish project-based challenges together.

Ideas in Action:

Engaging Families during Summer Lunch

Baltimore County Public Library (MD) has started partnering with schools to offer summer lunches at various branches. State law requires parents to accompany children under age eight to the library, so many adults who come into the library for the lunch program also learn about the library's summer programming. Some summer learning programs focus on STEM, literacy, and health and fitness (i.e., On Your Mark, Get Set, Read, walking book talks), while others provide spaces for children and families to work together (i.e., maker spaces, coding camps, gaming, group play areas). For example, family-centered coding camps hosted during the summer lunch program allow parents and their children to learn computer coding skills and complete coding challenges by working together.

Offering Family Literacy Nights for Families of Youth Receiving Homework Help

The **Cuyahoga County Public Library** (OH) offers Homework Help Centers in ten of its branches for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Wanting to get families involved, the library started Homework Help Family Literacy Nights. Once a month, the library brings in psychologists, developmental specialists, and other education experts to lead family-centered activities around learning, academic achievement, and social and emotional development. The program allows parents and their children not only to learn about important topics but also to learn together.

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Engaging Mothers and Tween Daughters in Tinkering and Making Projects

At **Sunnyvale Public Library** (CA), the Make-HER Program is designed to give girls ages eight to twelve and their mothers a chance to work together on creative, hands-on STEM learning opportunities. Led by a team of #LadyMakers, all specializing in a different STEM field, girls and their mothers (or female mentors) inspire each other to experiment and build confidence in STEM concepts. The program builds girls' confidence as well as stronger mother-daughter bonds. The weekly two-hour sessions also provide ideas for activities mothers and daughters can do at home to extend the concepts.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Use the summer months to engage families.

☑ Create project-based activities (e.g., maker spaces, contests) to "flip the script," meaning children teach the adults as they colearn, make, and innovate together.

☑ Think of low-touch/high-impact ways to engage families in youth learning. For example, if youth are engaged in a filmmaking project, invite families to a film festival celebration to screen what youth have done and learn about their successes.

☑ Tweak existing activities to support family engagement. For example, tutors from afterschool homework clubs can hold office hours to meet with parents once a month to talk about children's interests and accomplishments or send home progress reports.

☑ Invite school teachers to participate in library activities for families to reinforce the home-school-library connection.

Reinforce: Lifelong Learning

What: Libraries support adults in reaching their lifelong learning goals.

Why: Libraries have always had the mission to inspire lifelong learning. When families are continually learning—whether it's to further their own education, improve their job skills, or learn how to care for children—they reap benefits beyond just the content being studied. For example, families become role models for their children, who see their family members fulfilling their goals. Lifelong learners also gain self-confidence and pride, which in turn can influence families' feelings, routines, and future actions. Even more, higher levels of parent educational attainment are strongly associated with many positive outcomes for children, including school readiness, educational achievement, and positive social behaviors. By supporting families as lifelong learners, libraries are playing a powerful role in promoting healthy and strong families.

Ideas in Action:

Creating Learning Spaces for Immigrant, Refugee, and Asylee Populations

The **Denver Public Library's** (CO) Community Learning Plaza is an intergenerational learning initiative tailored to meet the needs of immigrant, refugee, and asylee populations. Plazas are open spaces where immigrants from all over the world can connect with resources and meet new people. Participants can study for citizenship exams, practice speaking new languages, and receive legal advice. Through the Plaza program, the Denver Public Library partners with the Denver Art Museum. Once a month, students and families work with museum staff to create works of art, such as piñatas, paintings, and quilts, based on themes that include home, family, celebration, and identity. Families are encouraged to represent their cultural heritage through their work, which is then displayed once a year at the museum.

Providing Workforce Recovery and Job Skills Training

The **Bensenville Community Public Library** (IL) has become the one-stop shop for families wanting to advance their careers. Library staff realized a need for community members to improve their workforce skills and began offering resources and workshops on topics that include digital literacy, job seeking, small businesses and entrepreneurship, and personal finance skills. The library also offers and supports a range of technologies, including business-card-making software, business-plan-development software, and even online classes to extend families' education. Every member of the staff, along with a cadre of volunteers, including retired business professionals and Facebook-savvy high school students, contributes their expertise to this initiative.

Supporting Adult Learning

The Center for Adult Learning (CAL) at the **Jacksonville Public Library** (FL) provides a community learning environment for adults who are no longer part of the K–12 educational system as well as for adults who are learning English. CAL offers GED classes, courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages, and a Career Online High School in which participants can earn a high school diploma and career certification. CAL also offers adult literacy services and basic education through the organization Learn To Read, which moved its offices to the library to make services more accessible to residents.

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Redesigning Adult Classes with Families' Schedules in Mind

The **Cuyahoga County Public Library** (OH) helps families pursue their own learning goals, especially when parenting can make taking traditional classes difficult. For example, when parents in GED classes at the library said it was a challenge to continue with their studies during the summer, when children were not in school, the library responded by reinventing its GED program to include a summer camp for children. Now parents have the opportunity to work with their GED instructor while their children are in summer camp developing literacy through the arts. By offering an intergenerational program that supports children and families, individually and together, the library builds a strong foundation for family engagement and lifelong learning.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Partner with organizations that provide learning opportunities for adults.

☑ Consider families' schedules and lives when planning or holding sessions by offering child care or enrichment activities for children at the same times as adult classes.

☑ Understand the lifelong learning goals and desires of families in the community and develop programming to meet these needs.

"Our library holds a unique position as the early education department of the City of San Jose. In 2013, the city's Early Care and Education Commission and the Library Commission combined into the Library and Early Education Commission. We provide curriculum development, professional training, and assessment services to early childhood sites around the city. We created a story time curriculum for parents and caregivers that aligns with state school readiness standards for literacy.

—Jill Bourne, San Jose Public Library (CA)

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Relate

What: Libraries offer opportunities for families to build peer-to-peer relationships and increase social networks.

Why: Through connections made in libraries, families can expand their support networks and gain access to community resources; having large social networks promotes well-being, especially among families living in poverty. The peer connections made in libraries help families gain useful tips on topics such as child rearing or where to send their children to school. Library resources can also help families learn about and gain access to health and social services that mitigate material hardship.

Ideas in Action:

Developing Relationships through Library Cafés

Across the state, Maryland libraries bring families of young children together through family or library cafés. While children participate in play activities, librarians hold conversations with parents that focus on lifelong learning and the excitement and challenges of raising young children. Parents support each other and share information that is useful for children's learning and parents' development. At the **Carroll County Public Library** (MD), for example, one group of Spanish-speaking parents shared that they learn English by reading aloud books to their children and adopting new words from them.

Connecting Dads

Watertown Free Public Library (MA) offers Dads 'N' Donuts—a monthly opportunity for fathers and other male caregivers to bring children to the library as part of their weekend morning routine. Fathers and their children enjoy coffee and doughnuts while exploring the library together. One outcome has been a growing network of fathers who provide support and encouragement to other male caregivers in the community.

Developing Social Networks through Family Service Learning

The **San Mateo County Libraries** (CA) run Toyota Family Learning, an intergenerational program from the National Center for Families Learning. The model offers a variety of opportunities for parents to work together on topics, whether it's building computer

literacy or learning how to gain confidence in helping their children with schoolwork. The family service learning component brings families and children together to design projects that give back to the community. Two service learning examples include organizing a community-wide cleanup and working with local food shelters to decrease food insecurity—pressing community needs that families felt strongly about solving. Families are paired with one another to serve as mentors who can share information and foster one another's self-sufficiency. The program has led to increases in parents' self-efficacy, leadership skills, and social connections.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Take time during story times or other events for parents to meet, talk, and get to know each other.

☑ Gather families for casual weekly game events, such as playing board games, doing puzzles, or playing cards.

☑ Provide opportunities for parents to share information with one another and take leadership roles in library events.

Reimagine: An Ecology of Learning

What: In partnership with early childhood programs, schools, and afterschool programs, libraries reimagine what learning can look like throughout a community and amplify opportunities for family engagement.

Why: Children and youth learn anywhere and anytime—not just in schools. Partnerships among learning-focused institutions, such as libraries, museums, early childhood programs, schools, and afterschool programs, allow organizations to share mechanisms for outreach and recruitment, space, funding, staff, and curriculum. These partnerships also create new ways for families to take part in children's learning. For example, afterschool programs are known to improve parents' communication with their children and their understanding of older children's friendships, interests, and talents.

Ideas in Action:

Reimagining the Public Library's Role in Afterschool

Afterschool programs have historically been an important support for working families. With a growing need for quality afterschool options, particularly for children from low-income homes, **Martin Library (**PA) contracted with the School District of the City of York to provide afterschool programming at K–8 local schools. The partnership fills the need of families for safe and enriching afterschool experiences for students. The library's afterschool activities include:

• Homework help and enrichment in the science and arts—all provided by library staff.

• A hot meal and snack provided through a partnership with a local church's food and nutrition outreach program.

• Family participation at the end of the week in activities around the work the children have completed (e.g., looking at artwork, watching a skit).

Innovative learning projects include a cultural awareness program created by the city's poet laureate and performing arts classes by local theater experts. At the culmination of the programs, families come in to see displays, projects, and cultural traditions presented by the children.

Reenvisioning the Public Library as an Interplanetary Museum

In an out-of-this-world approach to engaging families in science programming, **Contra Costa County Library** (CA) is reimagining the library as a space exploration destination for children and families. This transformation is made possible through the Science-Technology Activities and Resources Library Education Network (STAR_Net), a project of the Space Science Institute's National Center for Interactive Learning. The project is funded by the National Science Foundation and its core partners include the American Library Association, the Lunar and Planetary Institute, and the Afterschool Alliance. Among the resources the project provides are tours of large hands-on library exhibits, library staff training, and resources to implement hands-on activities for different age groups. Contra Costa County Library adopted the program as part of its mission to reenvision the library as an intergenerational learning center where family members could be exposed to new scientific concepts at no cost. To make the exhibit successful, the library reached out to community partners, including afterschool programs.

Forging Library and School Partnerships

The Inwood Branch of the **New York Public Library** (NY) has started an innovative partnership with prekindergarten teachers at P.S. 98, a nearby elementary school, in an effort to support family literacy and get children ready for school. As part of a larger initiative to enhance early literacy throughout the city via the support of New York public libraries, librarians at the Inwood Branch visit the school monthly, provide coffee and breakfast to parents, and copresent with teachers a thirty-five-minute parent workshop on early learning. Inwood serves a predominantly Latino population, so all workshops and materials are presented in English and Spanish. The workshops are codeveloped by the teacher and librarian based on parents' responses to a survey. These sessions have explored topics such as how to get children motivated to read, ways to look at books, expectations for kindergarten, ways to be involved in children's schooling at all grade levels, and supporting children with special needs. As a result of the partnership, an increasing number of families now spend time at the library and check out books. The school also reported a 36 percent rise in parent engagement.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Map the different organizations and spaces in your community to understand where children, youth, and adults learn.

☑ Start conversations with different community groups about their perspectives on services that are missing for families in the community, and ways you might partner to fill these gaps.

☑ Talk with individual children and families about how the library can better align services with different learning spaces.

Reimagine: Healthy Children, Healthy Families

What: Libraries are expanding their community partnerships to include health care professionals so that families are healthy and strong.

Why: Today, libraries are linking to a more varied group of community partners than ever before, such as schools, early childhood programs, parks and recreation departments—and especially, health care providers. Children are ready to learn when they are healthy. Making health information and resources available through libraries helps families support young children's brain development, promote good health and nutrition habits, and access preventive services.

Ideas in Action:

Teaming Up with Nurses for a Healthy Community

Through a partnership with the Pima County Health Department, **Pima County Public Library** (AZ) hosts a Library Nurse Program. Responding to data showing that many families who come to libraries lack shelter, health insurance, or medical care, the library was inspired to do something different—add a registered nurse to its payroll. Today, one nurse is employed by the library and stationed at the Joel D. Valdez Main Library; ten others, who work for the health department, visit eleven of the twenty-seven branches in the system at least once a month. Wearing stethoscopes, the nurses provide health education and referrals to other health care resources in the area rather than actual medical care. In addition to helping patrons get the health information they need, the program has also reduced the number of 911 calls from the libraries.

Partnering with Pediatricians

Inspired by research showing the importance of parent-child relationships and reading for healthy brain development, pediatricians throughout Kansas have become part of the Turn A Page, Touch A Mind program, modeled after the national program Reach Out and Read. Funded by the Kansas Pediatric Foundation, Turn A Page, Touch A Mind supports doctors in giving reading advice and books at well-child checkups for children, ages six months through five years. The **Wichita Public Library** (KS) has been able to augment this program with the Checkup and Check Out For Kansas Kids initiative. With state library funds, librarians give participating physicians additional information to share with families, including flyers promoting local library events, and information about the key literacy skills children need before they enter kindergarten. In addition, librarians give physicians vouchers to give to families at well-child visits for free, new, developmentally appropriate books, redeemable only by visiting the library. This program has helped families build their home libraries and also brought new families to the library.

Engagement:
The 5Rs

Reimagining Libraries to Promote Healthy Lives

High youth and adult obesity rates are significant community health concerns in Houston. To address this community need, more than fifty agencies have partnered with **Houston Public Library's** (TX) Healthy L.I.F.E. (Literacy Initiative For Everyone) program to empower families, particularly youth and families from low-income backgrounds, to live and lead healthy lives. The initiative offers families information and tools for healthy living. Its approach is intergenerational, with topics such as "Creating Healthy Lifestyles Together" and "Organizing the Home for Stress-Free Living and School Success." Families can access other available services through the program, like signing up for a library card or enrolling in Your Texas Benefits. Over 3,100 family members have received services or resources through this program.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Meet with health care providers throughout the community in order to better understand community needs and focus activities and outreach efforts on the greatest health needs (e.g., obesity, asthma, etc.). Ask health care partners what they recommend for the library so it can assist filling identified needs and gaps.

☑ Start healthy initiatives in your library, such as yoga classes, walking book talks, and other events.

Support Services

Libraries offer the space and resources—both print-based and digital—for seamless family engagement experiences. These experiences allow for individual learning, parent-child interaction, and peer-to-peer dialogues.

Librarians:

- Update collections so that they are diverse and family friendly.
- Create welcoming spaces.
- Provide technology access and guidance.

Update Collections

What: Library collections address the interests, languages, cultures, and needs of children and families.

Why: Families are more likely to use collections and get involved in their children's learning if they feel that materials, like books and digital media resources, are meant for them. Likewise, families are drawn to materials that reflect their families' culture, language, goals, and values. Updating collections also means making them easy to borrow and reimagining what happens when collections borrowed by families are not returned on time. While fines have been an institutional rule at many libraries, they have widened the library access gap between low-income families and more-affluent families. Some families have resorted to forbidding their children from borrowing books and media because of the fines. Some libraries prohibit computer use to patrons with outstanding fines, a policy which disproportionately hurts low-income families without computer and Internet access at home. Other libraries are reviewing their policies on fines to continue to serve all families.

Ideas in Action:

Building Collections That Honor Families' Culture

In 2014, the **Richfield Public Library** (UT) was among five libraries to receive a Talk Story grant from the American Library Association. Talk Story is an initiative that provides minigrants to help libraries build culturally relevant collections and programs. It directs its grants to Asian Pacific American and American Indian/Alaska Native children and their families. Richfield Public Library used the funds to:

• Expand the library's collection, with over fifty additional fiction and nonfiction books and DVDs featuring American Indian actors.

• Offer cultural dance classes.

• Provide American Indian art activities, such as telling stories and crafts.

Richfield Public Library continues to find ways to make the acquired collection accessible by grouping all American Indian books and resources thematically in an easy-to-find location.

Circulating Developmentally Appropriate Toys

Realizing the power of play and the need for circulating children's toys in the community, a team at the Panorama City Branch of the **Los Angeles Public Library** (CA) created LA PLays, a circulation system of 120 backpack "play kits" filled with developmentally appropriate toys, related books, and engaging activity cards. LA PLays is a fun and effective approach to spark creativity and conversations between parents and their children, thus encouraging essential parent-child verbal interaction. The play kits have increased the circulation of books in the library, family engagement with library services, and literacy skills among young children. The success of this project has led the library to expand LA PLays to three additional branches.

Support Services

Forgiving Overdue Fines

Fine forgiveness in several Maryland libraries creates more equitable use of library resources. For example, Read Down Your Fines at Baltimore's **Enoch Pratt Free Library** (MD) system works like this: when children and teens read in the library each week, they log reading hours that earn them fine forgiveness. The program helps reduce gaps in library utilization between families from low-income and upper-income homes.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Provide a variety of books in families' home languages.

☑ Diversify collections beyond just books to include items such as toys, fishing tackle, or hiking backpacks and maps.

☑ Choose books that have characters that reflect families' culture and experiences.

☑ Develop alternatives to fines for families who cannot return materials on time.

" We see families with younger children talking to other families in story hours all the time. But as kids get older, libraries focus less on family programs, so I suspect those opportunities are happening outside of the library. We are currently recreating our physical space so that it is a destination for families and children to go to stay and connect. "

–Diane Banks, Toronto Public Library (ON)

Create Welcoming Spaces: Inside the Library

What: Libraries offer an inviting space for learning and interaction. Libraries also serve as a community institution that can provide a safe space in troubling and difficult times.

Why: Libraries are many things, but above all else, they are safe, welcoming, and calm spaces where children and families can learn and explore together. Spaces that are conducive to promoting family engagement:

- Emphasize physical areas that are clean and orderly.

- Provide a wide set of rich materials that children, youth, and families can interact with creatively.

- Include adults who are supporting, caring, and responsive to children's and adults' needs.

- Reflect the diversity of families' backgrounds.

- Accommodate children of all ages and children with special needs.

- Include areas that can be active and those that can be cozy and quiet.

- Reserve areas—regardless of how small—where adults can talk comfortably with one another.

Ideas in Action:

Making the Library a Sensory Experience

As part of the renovation of **Boston Public Library's** (MA) children's reading room, families and librarians envisioned a fun, engaging space for children and for parent-child interactions. The result is the Boston Public Library's Sensory Wall. The Sensory Wall offers LED panels and bubble tubes to stimulate senses in a playful, child-directed environment. It also provides a learning environment for children with sensory-processing disorders.

Designing Spaces to Tinker and Experiment

At **Denver Public Library's Central Library** (CO), children and families can enjoy tinkering with equipment, materials, and software to design an array of creative products. Called SM Energy ideaLAB, this maker space and digital media lab is open year round, with different hours targeted for specific age groups—teens, adults, and families. The library also provides workshops on computer basics, coding, robotics, and software. During family time at ideaLAB, staff members make sure children and adults spend meaningful time together. Their slogan is *No child without an adult; No adult without a child.* The ideaLAB staff also collaborate with the children's department to provide activities for younger children who often attend with their older siblings and parents.

Support Services

Offering a Safe Space in Troubling Times

When Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was fatally shot by a police officer, the city of Ferguson, Missouri, was overcome by riots and violence, which led community businesses and schools to close their doors. But one building in the city of Ferguson was committed to remaining open and "doing everything in its power to serve the community"—the **Ferguson Municipal Public Library** (MO). By remaining open during this time of need, the library became a safe space for children and families to assemble and for teachers to hold classes for students who had nowhere to go since the schools were closed. "School of Peace," the library's effort to provide an ad hoc school, organized volunteers to teach math, science, reading, and other subject areas to over 200 students. Students continued their studies and families found stability and support during troubled times.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Place puzzles, coloring books, and Legos openly out on tables.

☑ Designate a small space in the library where parents can talk with one another.

☑ Find ways to continually transform sections of the library into different "exhibits" so that the environment is fresh and gives families and children new areas to explore.

☑ Set aside a safe place for librarians and families to have private conversations.

☑ Design spaces that reinforce relationships between children and families. Place parenting collections near the children's area, for example.

Support Services

Create Welcoming Spaces: Outside the Library

What: Libraries support family engagement by bringing services and programming beyond the physical space of the library.

Why: Librarians are increasingly reaching out beyond the brick-and-mortar walls of the physical library to bring library resources, materials, and services to locations frequented by families. This practice makes libraries accessible to all families, and further integrates the library into different functions of community learning. Libraries are also being creative about utilizing outdoor spaces, developing gardens and other interactive nature areas.

Ideas in Action:

Bringing the Library to the Mall

Bookmarks, a local branch of the **Dallas Public Library** (TX), is drawing crowds of families to a rather unique location—the shopping mall. In this unconventional spot, the library provides story time, homework help, free Internet access, and, of course, books! Whether they are practicing yoga, dancing and singing to nursery rhymes, or exploring STEM through stories, Bookmarks offers parents and children ages birth to twelve a variety of enriching parent-child activities that transform the shopping experience. The library's activities, with about thirteen events each week, have become so popular that many library programs are now held in the center of the shopping mall. On any Saturday, about 200 to 300 families flock to the mall to attend events like French story time, singing puppet performances, and shoelace-tying workshops. Given the program's popularity with the community, the Dallas Public Library plans to expand to another local mall, providing even more families and children with meaningful educational opportunities.

Taking Flight with a Library in an Airport

The **Free Library of Philadelphia** (PA) brings a taste of its digital resources to weary travelers in need of a relaxing time at Philadelphia International Airport. Visitors to the all-virtual location have access to free Wi-Fi and can download from a selection of e-books and author event podcasts, or explore a catalog of over 40,000 digital images. Families on the go can visit the Free Library's Kids Page for literacy activities, resources, and events while en route to their next destination.

Covering More Ground through Pop-Up Libraries

Suffolk Public Library (VA) has literally left the building with its pop-up library. A pop-up library simply takes whatever is in the library and makes it mobile and accessible to be used outside. Whether it's a crate of books, a system for checking out the books (laptop, iPad, pen and paper), library resource information (i.e., posters, program brochures), or a quick story time set up on a mat, it can be as big or small as needed. Pop-up library blitzes, or a series of pop-up library events, can be used as a part of National Library Week or as a kickoff to a library campaign, such as a summer reading program. Hosting regular pop-ups at various locations (retirement homes, YMCA, farmer's market) allows library staff to meet families where they are. With the pop-up library, the Suffolk Public Library now covers more ground and has raised public awareness about the library and its services, including those for families with young children. The pop-up has even increased library card registrations—over 800 new cards in the first nine months.

Support Services

Bringing the Indoors Outdoors

Middle Country Public Library (NY) is encouraging families to spend time exploring and appreciating the outdoors. It is the first library in the nation to be certified as a Nature Explorium classroom. The Nature Explorium, an outdoor learning space for children and families, features a variety of areas geared toward connecting children to different aspects of nature. Through the outdoor space, the library offers a unique way for children and families to connect literacy, learning, and appreciation for nature. For example, after growing tomatoes in the outdoor garden, the librarians held a salsa celebration day where children and families prepared salsa using the fresh ingredients, read books about salsa, and danced the afternoon away!

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Talk with different community organizations and businesses about using their spaces to share library materials with families. The presence might range from a box of books to a whole new branch!

☑ Assess the area outside of the library. Is there an opportunity to build a learning space beyond the library's walls?

☑ Create a traveling cart of books and art supplies to bring to community fairs and events.

"We approached the Colorado State Park and Wildlife division to see if they wanted to partner with libraries to promote curiosity and learning about nature. They jumped on it, and we recently released a Check Out Colorado State Parks program in 287 libraries throughout the state. Libraries now check out backpacks; each one is filled with a park pass, binoculars, brochures, and pictorial nature guides—and we are already seeing heavy use of these from families. One grandparent wrote on a survey, 'This park pass is a blessing to have!'

—Sharon Morris, Colorado State Library (CO)

Provide Technology Access and Guidance

What: Libraries help families tap into digital media and technology to promote children's learning.

Why: Children, youth, and adults use digital media to acquire information, produce new content, make social connections, and work collaboratively with others to solve problems and develop new knowledge. Participating in this digital world requires that everyone has access to technology and an understanding of how to use it. Family members increasingly look to libraries for guidance. For this reason, librarians' roles have been evolving to that of media mentors—helping families understand the best ways to incorporate digital media into children's education and library services. And, when parents use digital media alongside their children—through coviewing, collaborating, and colearning—the educational value of the digital media experience is enhanced.

Ideas in Action:

Transforming Librarians into Media Mentors

Homer Public Library (AK) serves a geographic area over sixty miles in size, with a population of about 5,000 people, and with some villages so remote, they are only accessible by plane or boat. The library reaches out to families who might not be able to come to the library on a regular basis in a variety of ways, including through the use of its digital media platform. The library website offers access to curated content that families and children can enjoy together in their homes. But library staff members also serve as media mentors, offering families the knowledge, skills, and confidence to use the digital tools with their children effectively. When families come into the library, they receive advice on recommended websites, apps, audio books, e-books, or other forms of technology that meet their needs. A mounted iPad on the library wall, with instructions on how to use it, gives families opportunities to explore digital media in the library with their children and ask questions of the librarian as they come up. The library also offers a variety of programs—story times, maker camps, and parent workshops—to support families and children using digital media together.

Creating Apps for Families to Support Children's Learning

Developed by the **Allen County Public Library** (IN), Family App is an age-appropriate, learn-together digital literacy tool for families with children ages birth through fourth grade. The app features a number of innovative elements to enhance early literacy and family engagement, including: push notifications with parenting and literacy tips and "fun facts" to share with children; librarian-created book lists with reading suggestions; video and audio clips featuring strategies for integrating reading, talking, singing, playing, and writing into everyday life; and a library events calendar of children's programming. By capitalizing on the widespread use of smartphones, the library is building relationships with families in a way that is familiar and convenient.

Support Services

Helping Families Find Quality Apps

The **Madison Public Library** (WI) has developed an App Finder—a database on its library website that provides library staff members' reviews and recommendations of apps for families and children to enjoy together. The collection includes apps for children age eight and under. To make families aware of the resource and to highlight new resources as they are added, on a biweekly basis one of the youth services librarians goes on the local TV news to talk about the app, how to access it, use it, and what benefits it can bring. The segment from the news clip is then posted on the App Finder so families can watch the library in action and get tutorials on how to use the app effectively.

What Library Leaders Recommend:

☑ Post a list of apps that families might enjoy in a few different areas of your library for on-the-spot ideas.

☑ Use visuals to guide families when language might be a barrier. Put digital resources on display and create posters with simple guidelines on how to use them.

☑ Position library staff members to be on hand to guide family choices and use of digital materials.

☑ Create spaces where families and children can use digital media for colearning.

> " We have a focus on digital media and technology and trying to encourage that interaction between parents and caregivers and children of all ages. And it's a whole idea of sparking curiosity and new ways of learning. "
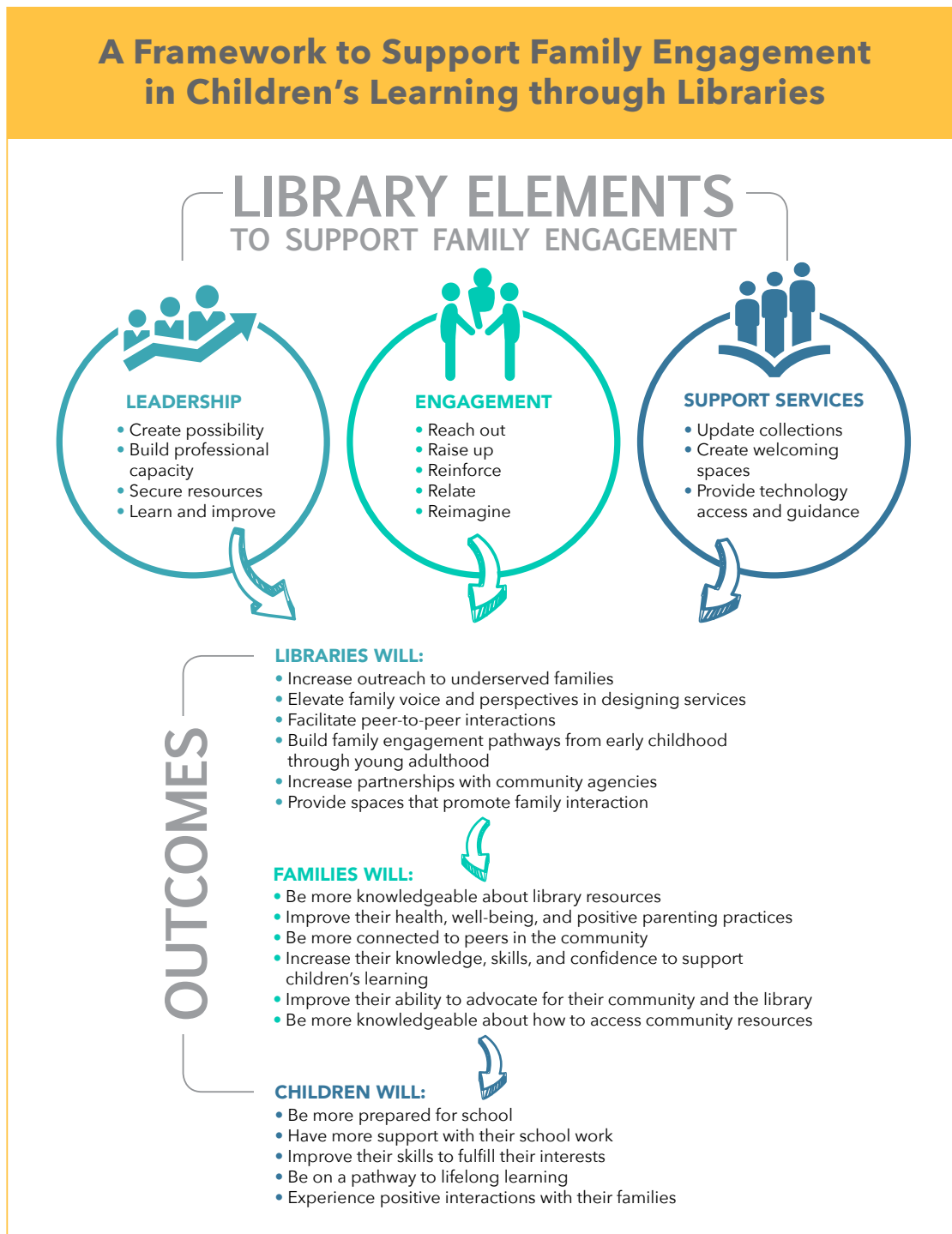>
> **—Dorothy Stoltz, Carroll County Public Library (MD)**

Part 3

Putting it all Together

What Does Family Engagement Look Like?

In their own voices, library leaders from three libraries talk about how their library systems are putting all of the elements of the family engagement framework into action. Keywords are highlighted to reinforce core elements of the framework.

A Framework to Support Family Engagement in Children's Learning through Libraries

LIBRARY ELEMENTS
TO SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP
- Create possibility
- Build professional capacity
- Secure resources
- Learn and improve

ENGAGEMENT
- Reach out
- Raise up
- Reinforce
- Relate
- Reimagine

SUPPORT SERVICES
- Update collections
- Create welcoming spaces
- Provide technology access and guidance

OUTCOMES

LIBRARIES WILL:
- Increase outreach to underserved families
- Elevate family voice and perspectives in designing services
- Facilitate peer-to-peer interactions
- Build family engagement pathways from early childhood through young adulthood
- Increase partnerships with community agencies
- Provide spaces that promote family interaction

FAMILIES WILL:
- Be more knowledgeable about library resources
- Improve their health, well-being, and positive parenting practices
- Be more connected to peers in the community
- Increase their knowledge, skills, and confidence to support children's learning
- Improve their ability to advocate for their community and the library
- Be more knowledgeable about how to access community resources

CHILDREN WILL:
- Be more prepared for school
- Have more support with their school work
- Improve their skills to fulfill their interests
- Be on a pathway to lifelong learning
- Experience positive interactions with their families

San Mateo County Libraries, California

Carine Risley, Library Services Manager

Leadership

In San Mateo County, the heart of Silicon Valley and one of the wealthiest regions of the world, 41 percent of children are not reading proficiently by the time they enter third grade. Leaders of the San Mateo County Libraries believe this is unacceptable and that it is incumbent upon the library system to **create possibility** for children and families, especially those who are most vulnerable. The library staff hold themselves accountable for providing the kind of enrichment activities that some children may not be able to experience otherwise. To promote equity, they've assessed all their young children's programs through this lens: How are they developing their programs to be inclusive; how are they acting as true partners to those they're serving, and how are they including families in program development? They ask if they are authentically engaging families. They want to get away from the idea that librarians are in control and families are simply observers.

Engagement

Outreach is about people; it's not being tied to a building. The only way to **reach out** to the families that need libraries the most is if the staff members leave the building to create partnerships and develop relationships. The San Mateo County librarians have set the bar higher for themselves by seeking out the families that are most disconnected from support services. Through a relationship with medical clinics that serve low-income populations, library staff members are available to enrich waiting rooms with books and other resources. In a new project, the library provides services to residents in Housing Authority of San Mateo County developments. The library seeks partners that work with high-need families or operate high-traffic sites, such as parks or high-profile concerts, and uses those venues as a platform to provide great experiences and engage people in great programs.

In addition to traditional drop-in programs, staff members also offer a growing number of enrollment-based programs that last over a period of time. The library serves caregivers and families that can be quite isolated and don't have that social network of support that helps people feel comfortable. The library provides opportunities for families to **relate** to one another, to **reinforce** what they are learning at the library and from other families, and to **raise up** their own leadership. One of the library's strongest partnerships is with the National Center for Families Learning, which provided the system with a three-year grant to operate a school-year program for elementary school students, ages six to ten, and their families.

Support

The library provides **technology access and guidance** directly linked to young children's language and literacy development in partnership with the LENA Research Foundation.[3] Families with children age thirty months or younger are enrolled in the San Mateo County Libraries' Talk, Read, Sing program in which they meet other every week for eight weeks. Parenting classes in English and Spanish are offered, and the parents take home a "talk pedometer," which measures the number of conversational turns and words spoken to the baby. The technology tracks conversations and assists parents in increasing language interactions with their child. Families also receive a book every week.

The gain in families' social capital has been impressive. Families in the first cohort developed close relationships, sharing with each other everything from how to address issues with grandparents and the importance of books in the home to understanding temperament and how babies love book time. Families even have clothing swaps with each other. The families love each other and the library staff members, and want to keep coming. Since the library's service approach has shifted to focus on the users' experience, the library staff feel they can now connect with families who did not previously have opportunities to be exposed to different types of learning experiences.

Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio

Sari Feldman, Executive Director

Pam Jankowski, Literacy and Learning Division Director

Tracy Strobel, Deputy Director

Leadership

Libraries are at the center of community life, providing an environment of reading, lifelong learning, and civic engagement that is vital to a region's educational objectives and economic growth. In Cuyahoga County, educational attainment represents a challenge to the community's future success, with less than one-third of the adult population holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Recognizing the role that the library can play in **creating possibilities** for advancing education, Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) has made a commitment to serving local residents with year-round weekend and evening hours and expanded access to library services for students and families.

Staff training is an essential component of CCPL's family engagement strategy. Children's librarians and staff are trained in Every Child Ready to Read. Five children's librarians were also certified through Family Place Libraries, a national network of children's librarians. Children's staff at CCPL receive digital media training, allowing them to thoughtfully integrate technology into early literacy programming. This training is essential to delivering more robust learning opportunities to the community. Assessing performance requires that CCPL place a priority on **collecting data** in order to continually improve programs. CCPL uses pre- and post-test surveys to understand the outcomes that programs such as Family Literacy Nights and Kindergarten Club can achieve.

Engagement

CCPL **reaches out** to families through grassroots efforts, such as leaving flyers at community centers, beauty salons, and other local gathering places. The library also leverages partnerships with local agencies serving youth to reach target audiences. CCPL focuses on family engagement as a means for deep learning opportunities. It follows a model wherein families come to the library, share a meal together, and then work in cohort groups to **reinforce** and build skills and knowledge in specific topics. For example, CCPL's Kindergarten Club helps parents or caregivers learn from a specialist while children are engaged in a learning activity with a librarian. The sessions conclude with family members collaborating on a project that aligns with that day's lesson plan.

Truly effective engagement occurs when CCPL provides opportunities for families to develop **relationships** and social connections that can last a lifetime. For example, CCPL's monthly Family Literacy Nights engage parents and children in kindergarten through eighth grade who participate in afterschool homework clubs. At Family Literacy Nights, parents learn healthy parenting tips and strategies while forming bonds with other parents in the program by sharing what they have learned and helping one another to set goals.

Support

Beyond programming, CCPL has renovated or replaced library branches, with families as the top priority. Play **spaces** have been reconfigured so they are inviting and encourage children to move around, play, and express themselves. This creates a platform for connecting with parents and enabling trained librarians and paraprofessionals to engage with families while they are visiting a branch. CCPL also understands the importance of introducing young children to **digital tools** and helping parents establish appropriate boundaries for screen time while exposing children to technology that enhances learning.

York County Libraries, Pennsylvania

Paula Gilbert, Director of Youth Services for Martin Library
and the York County Library System

Leadership

The mission and vision of the York County Library System is to connect families to the library and provide opportunities for families to learn in many different ways in very different places. Staff members **create possibilities** for families and children by helping them see that their everyday learning is beyond what they get in school. Staff members show them that there is something they can learn for themselves, something they are interested in, and how those topics connect to their own family life.

Engagement and Support

The York County Library System has thirteen libraries, both rural and urban, and the staff believe libraries are more than a building—they are part of the community. Leaders need to **reach out** and connect to offer opportunities to families and individuals to grow at their own pace and in their own way.

Library staff members have found that parents like to participate in activities that they can do with their kids. For example, an inquiry-based science program brings together families and children to do science experiments together. After operating the program for several years, interest in science has grown significantly. Parents and children enjoy the library's technology resources and services as well. Throughout all of its programming, the library strives to develop opportunities for families to **relate** to one another and **reinforce** each other's learning.

Libraries all over are learning that they have to partner to **reimagine** their value to the community. Partnering helps libraries grow and connect what they have to what others can offer, allowing everyone involved to get better. The York County Library System is no different. A few years ago, the York County Library System received a grant to create packets of materials based on the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards so that all story times across the system would have consistent quality, and comparable access to **collections**, promotion, and communication to families about the benefits of the program.

Organizations ask the library to partner with them because the library is seen as an institution that can get things done and come up with creative and innovative ideas. The School District of the City of York is York County Library System's biggest partner in serving school-age children. The system provides library aides to schools to keep school libraries open every day. The library has a contract to run the afterschool programs in the city schools five days a week. Teachers, youth staff, and community providers organize enrichment activities, homework help, hot meals, and snacks. Children usually create something, such as a piece of artwork or a skit, and at the end of the week or the month, families participate in an activity around the work. The York County Library System also provides summer programming in the city's school libraries. As the York County Library System shows, libraries can be innovative, exciting, and engaging, and that serves the community well.

Part 4

What Lies Ahead

This IDEABOOK demonstrates what libraries are doing in different communities to reach out to families, raise up family views and voices, reinforce family knowledge and skills, provide families opportunities to relate to one another, and reimagine community partnerships to support families. These elements of engagement are part of a larger system that requires leadership to create possibilities for innovation and support services, such as collections, space, and technology, in order to function effectively.

In closing this IDEABOOK, below are five forward-looking actions that libraries can take.

1. Create a clear pathway for continuous family engagement.

Libraries have a long history of helping families promote young children's learning and development. Through story times and Every Child Ready to Read, libraries have established an important foundation for continuing to engage families even beyond early childhood. Families play an important role in motivating and supporting their children's learning. Sustaining this engagement in the school years is an area ripe for library innovation. While libraries welcome family participation in activities for school-age children, they can be *intentional* in creating family-oriented learning experiences that align with the pressing educational issues of our time.

Grade-level reading, for example, is one area that lends itself to establishing a clear pathway for family engagement before and during the school years. The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress results indicate that only 21 percent of students from low-income backgrounds scored at or above the proficient range in fourth-grade reading.[4] While reading proficiency has generally improved over the past decade, there still remain large disparities in reading proficiency associated with income, race, dual-language, and disability status.[5] Failure to read proficiently by the early grades is linked with ongoing academic difficulties, lower graduation rates, and fewer chances of economic well-being and career success as an adult.[6]

The South Jamaica branch of the Queens Library in New York (p.31) plays a leading role in a multiagency neighborhood literacy initiative that serves families with children from birth through fifth grade. "Given the range of services of partnering organizations, it was essential to have an anchoring institution for the initiative," says Danielle Pulliam, a program officer from The Pinkerton Foundation, which funds the initiative. "The library was the natural choice for us for a number of reasons: children and families of any age can get engaged with the library, the library was already a part of the community landscape, and all of the partnering organizations referred participants to the library for additional resources and opportunities."[7]

2. Build on library assets in new ways.

Libraries are expanding their educational roles to better serve communities. Libraries are using their assets—expertise, tools, resources, and space—to broaden their services not only for families but also for those who serve families with young children. In a national survey of family engagement in public libraries, directors report that 64 percent of librarians are extremely or very knowledgeable about child development and that 52 percent are extremely or very knowledgeable about family engagement.[8] To spread and share this knowledge, an emerging aspect of library service is to train childcare providers and preschool teachers in early literacy.

"Most pre-K programs didn't have training so the library has been training pre-K teachers to show them how to engage children while also engaging parents in how to read to their children," explains Felton Thomas Jr., director of the Cleveland Public Library (p. 17). "We reach Head Start and also small home-based programs."

Libraries are spaces where families and community educators can come for curated materials on family engagement and also to talk with other educators about best family engagement practices. On the horizon, the New York Public Library (p. 38) plans to deliver a blended-learning early literacy staff training in partnership with the New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at the City University of New York.[9] This marks a strong commitment to deepen library staff competencies in family literacy, early childhood development, and support for childcare and pre-K providers. Training modules will be developed and piloted with 150 New York Public Library staff members, and the curriculum and instructional materials will be disseminated nationally for use by other library systems.

With the growth of technology in libraries, librarians are assuming new educational roles as media mentors—experts who guide children, youth, and families to make informed decisions about media use.[10] In a national survey of family engagement in libraries, over half of directors reported that their libraries serve the whole family through access to digital media and technology programs. The same survey found that 94 percent of directors also think it is important or very important for librarians to become experts on digital media.[11]

Librarians expand family knowledge by guiding them through different media—both print and online. "I act as a media mentor for families so that they can navigate the Wild West of digital media," says Claudia Haines of the Homer Public Library in Alaska (p. 48).

According to Haines, being a media mentor means providing access to high-quality digital content for children and families who don't have access elsewhere. It is also about providing media advisory, meaning that librarians help families access information in a wide range of formats. "Let's say a family comes into the library with their little person who is a huge dinosaur fan and immediately heads to the dinosaur section to check out books," Haines describes. "My job is to help them access information and media in any format that would support their aspiring paleontologist. So I might ask, 'Oh, have you seen this audiobook? Do you know about this cool dinosaur app? Did you know that there is a dinosaur expert at the museum next week?'"

3. Develop multigenerational learning models.

Libraries are making a shift from supporting learning to increasing intergenerational learning opportunities. This means that libraries are not only broadening learning beyond the classroom, but they are also venturing beyond literacy and homework clubs to include new programs for families and children in science, technology, math, art, engineering, and social skill development. From maker spaces to coding sessions and a focus on health and well-being, libraries are increasing lifelong learning. And with this comes the opportunity to make learning experiences appealing for children as well as families. In Baltimore, for example, science teachers work at library branches during the summer to run science programs for students in the lower and upper elementary grades "Each year it's a different

curriculum so that if they want to keep doing it every summer, it's not the same thing," says Marisa Conner of the Baltimore Public Library (p. 32). "Parents come too and are involved with their kids. We have several mobile maker spaces—3-D printers, low- and high-tech stuff—parents are fascinated!"

Nancy Andrus, who organizes Make-HER, a hands-on, project-based STEM program for mothers and daughters at the Sunnyvale Public Library in California (p. 33), says she wants to expose girls to strong female role models who find creative ways of integrating STEM into their interests and careers. The program targets girls between the ages of eight and twelve because research shows that this is the age when girls begin losing interest and confidence in STEM. "Some moms have said, 'I always defer to my husband in these tech things,' but when these moms had their hands in circuitry, they were empowered and said, 'Wow I never thought I could do this,'" Andrus says. "I would also see some mothers with really strong tech skills. It was great to see girls watching their moms with pride. We heard one daughter say, 'Look, my mom's pretty cool.'"

4. Be proactive in offering equal access.

Public libraries are central in providing informational resources to *all* community members. They are committed to serving nontraditional patrons, including those experiencing homelessness, incarceration, and mental health challenges. Some suburban libraries are consciously making an effort to reach out to neighborhoods where disadvantaged families live while others are transforming their services in the face of dramatic demographic shifts in their communities. To reach underserved families, libraries often establish partnerships with public housing departments, schools, Head Start and home visiting programs, justice and corrections departments, food banks, and other community agencies.

Julie Roach from the Cambridge Public Library (p. 20) explains that in her affluent Massachusetts community, providing equal access means making a lot of efforts to reach the underserved. Through the Cambridge Book Bike, an update to the Book Mobile, children receive free books during the summer as well as a meal, a chance to do an activity, a story time, and a visit with the librarians. In another partnership, librarians bring story time to transitional housing facilities, let people know what the library offers, and

sign them up for library cards. "We work really hard to make sure that there aren't barriers for folks," Roach says. "For example, we don't have fines on children's materials. We spend plenty of time talking about what may make it harder or less comfortable for them here, and try to address it."

5. Apply a human-centered design approach.

Libraries will continue to thrive as hubs of knowledge preservation and generation by attending to the user experience. A human-centered approach focuses on developing empathy and putting oneself in another's place, imagining what that person feels and experiences.[12] It can offer librarians deeper insights into families' interests and needs so that they can design meaningful programs and services. It also validates families' perspectives and voices about their libraries and contributes to strengthening the community.

At the Cleveland Public Library (p. 17), librarians participate in the Ohio Association of Foodbanks' poverty simulation. The simulation builds empathy by focusing on the experiences of individuals going from one public agency to another, trying to gain access to the resources. Library staff members assume the roles of different family members facing a variety of circumstances in which they need help. Then they use

their experience to reflect on how to make libraries more welcoming institutions.

Libraries have begun to use a design thinking approach pioneered by the consulting firm IDEO. The firm worked with the Chicago Public Library and Aarhus Public Libraries to develop a toolkit, *Design Thinking For Libraries*.[13] The Watertown Free Public Library in Massachusetts tested a modified version of this approach, and learned that families of young children come to story times to expose their children to books, new children, and families and to meet other new parents (p. 27). Librarians also learned that families desire opportunities to share parenting advice in nonthreatening settings, like the library. In turn, the library has begun to add more time for parents to connect during story time.

"We are often used to sitting around and talking about what we might want to do differently and the pros and cons of it. But in design thinking, you get up, observe, talk with people, and physically try to come up with something new that is based on people's specific needs," says Emily Miranda, supervisor of Children's Services at Watertown Free Public Library. "The process clarified what we are seeing with families. It was reaffirming to hear about what we are doing right, and it felt constructive to hear about what we could do better."

Final Thoughts

Librarians are community leaders. They are committed to making their communities a better place for everyone. As libraries seek to guide and facilitate family engagement in children's learning and development, it is clear that what lies ahead involves community partnerships; partnerships to reach underserved families, to complement formal education, to learn from the experiences of other institutions, to provide afterschool enrichment, and to connect families with resources beyond the library. In this way libraries are crossing boundaries and shaping a system of family engagement that extends throughout a child's formative years, supports children and families, and optimally prepares children for success in school and in life.

Our hope is that you will use the inspiration from what librarians across the country are accomplishing to take the next step. Tinker with the ideas and practices in this document—and create new ones—to establish viable family engagement services and programs in your library.

Part 5

Appendices

Methods

The purpose of this IDEABOOK is to illustrate ways libraries can systematically engage families to support children's learning. We approached its development with the core belief that the IDEABOOK should not be a prescriptive step-by-step guide. Instead, it is a series of ideas that address and build upon the important and ongoing family engagement work happening every day in libraries around the country. For this reason, we sought to listen to and lift up family engagement stories from librarians and document their work within an emerging family engagement framework. To do this, we engaged in a variety of overlapping and iterative activities that included the following:

- **Synthesized the research base for family engagement in public libraries.** Through a review of literature from a variety of fields, including neuroscience, sociology, developmental psychology, educational leadership, informal learning, and organizational psychology and management, we pulled out salient processes and practices related to the importance of family engagement, successful family engagement practices, and the potential for family engagement in library spaces.

- **Established an understanding of the status of family engagement in public libraries.** To gather baseline information about family engagement practices in libraries, we sent out an online survey in the winter of 2016 to approximately 1,600 library directors and branch managers affiliated with PLA. The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries circulated the survey to their membership as well. The survey included questions about library leadership to promote family engagement, family engagement in library services, and questions about librarians' roles with respect to families. Directors from 463 distinct public libraries completed the survey, with results showing that family engagement in public libraries is strong but that there is work to be done, particularly in building family engagement pathways beyond the early childhood years.[14]

- **Shared ideas and shaped resource materials through regular meetings with librarians involved in a family engagement learning community.** At the same time that we launched the survey, we created a learning community—a group of twenty librarians who met regularly over the course of the project—to share ideas and practices that set children and families on a pathway to use libraries for lifelong learning. Nine of the learning community participants were members of the PLA Family Engagement Task Force, while the remaining members were nominated by task force members. To have diverse representation, the members were selected based on geographic location, library size, community location, and populations served. Between February and November 2016, the learning community members convened five times. The majority of meetings were held virtually and one meeting was held in-person at the annual American Library Association conference. Meetings covered topics such as promising family engagement practices in libraries, the envisioned future of family engagement, ways to elevate family perspectives into library planning, and potential outcomes associated with family engagement processes.

- **Crowdsourced and lifted up promising practices shared by over forty libraries.** Beginning in the early spring of 2016, we interviewed key informants from libraries across the country. Interviewees were identified in a variety of ways. Learning community members and PLA Family Engagement Task Force members recommended libraries with promising family engagement practices, and we scanned reports, research studies, and news media to identify and contact other libraries with inspiring work. A number of librarians and researchers also contacted us through our website and we interviewed them. Other librarians shared their work during and after conference presentations. Interviews centered on the elements of the family engagement framework and the lessons learned from engaging families. Over forty semistructured interviews were conducted, and all interviews were taped and transcribed.

- **Sought feedback on prototypes of project resources.** At the PLA biannual conference in April 2016, we held a focus group with eight librarians from different areas of the country. The focus group lasted one and a half hours and gave participants an opportunity to share promising practices of family engagement in library settings and provide feedback on earlier drafts of the IDEABOOK.

- **Piloted a process that libraries can adopt to understand the dynamic interactions of children, families, and librarians.** We conducted a workshop and observation process to better understand the dynamic interaction of families and librarians. We used a human-centered design thinking approach to gain a deeper understanding of families' library experiences and ways that librarians could enhance their services to families with young children.

Collectively, our team read, synthesized, and analyzed data from each of these sources to draw out main themes and trends important to highlight in the IDEABOOK. We shared several drafts of the IDEABOOK with the Family Engagement Task Force and the learning community. In each cycle, comments and responses were used to realign and revise the contents and format of the sections. Profiles were checked for accuracy by key informants from featured libraries prior to publication.

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