



Community-Led

CONNECTING, CONSULTING AND COLLABORATING
TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES.

||||| epl.ca



Together, we can transform communities

Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking. Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams. Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don’t know. Talk to people you never talk to. Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty. Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible. Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something. Know that creative solutions come from new connections. Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together. Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world. Rely on human goodness. Stay together. - Margaret J. Wheatley





We're bigger than our buildings

At EPL, our communities mean the world to us. Each one of our branches serves communities with unique traits and characteristics. We want to get to know our community members to learn from them and take that information to drive our services. Our research shows that Edmontonians face many kinds of barriers to using our library. Whether it's a lack of transportation, an inability to read, a negative experience at our library, or homelessness, we strive to build relationships, reduce barriers and help Edmontonians make full use of EPL services. With all the great things we have to offer, we'd hate for anyone to miss out! And even more importantly, we'd hate to miss out on all the insightful ideas our communities have to share with us.

It's easy to think working with Edmonton's communities should be left to Community Librarians. Every EPL employee can play a role or can contribute to our community-led approach. Regardless of your position, you can make a difference each and every day you work at EPL and contribute to our community-led approach. Some important things to remember are:

- Talk it out! When you're not sure where to go or how to get there, share your stories about our customers with your colleagues – you have an understanding of your communities.
- Relationships are constantly evolving. It takes time to really get to know our communities.
- Making connections is simple: talk to someone new each week and ask those familiar faces how we can meet their needs.
- This guide won't be a step-by-step kit; it's intended to invite ideas – the rest is up to you.

“When we **commit** to a vision **to do something** that has **never been done** before, there is no way to know how to get there. We simply **have to build the bridge** as we walk on it.” - Robert Quinn

Community-led is the evolution of customer service

There's no doubt EPL's talented team provides excellent customer service every day. Making our excellent customer service community-led involves understanding our communities even more, finding out how our services can meet needs. It's learning about Edmontonians and matching our services with their needs. It's looking for ways EPL can evolve and grow, learning about the unique needs of individuals and communities, and shaping our services accordingly. Ask yourself how you can take it to the next level. How can you reduce barriers? How can you build relationships with the people in your community? Examine what can be done within our walls, and if opportunities arise, go beyond our walls to connect and learn with the people in your community.

COMMUNITY-LED AND OUTREACH: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

In a word: yes! But it's not that simple. First, let's define outreach. Outreach is when we go into the community and deliver a program. Some examples of outreach include: Baby Laptime for a New Mom's Group at a health centre or an Adult Storytime at a seniors' centre. So, where does outreach fit into community-led at EPL? It could be a foot in the door of an organization or something we do after getting to know a group. Outreach can be the entry point into building relationships and further understanding our communities. To use our examples from earlier, offering Baby Laptime to a New Mom's Group is community-led when it's responding to a need identified by the nurses at the health unit. An Adult Storytime at a seniors' centre is community-led when it is followed by a conversation with the seniors about the barriers they encounter when accessing library services. Outreach is an important piece of community-led: it's not the whole story.

The evolution of community-led at EPL

Communities are the reason we exist. EPL believes wholeheartedly that the foundation of our work must align with the needs of our communities. The communities we serve are the life force for everything we do; it only makes sense that we listen to their needs and formulate our programs and services with that in mind. In 2008, we hired our first community librarians and since then have kept the momentum going. Although our community-led service philosophy is ever evolving, we know we must have a high level of participation in our communities.



As illustrated in this chart, EPL strives for participative engagement with our communities. With some partnerships, we're able to reach the empowerment level of engagement to provide services and programs that support and grow Edmontonians and communities.

How can I contribute to community-led at EPL?

Regardless of your role, through building relationships, you can further your understanding of our communities. Whether we're working the desk of Lois Hole, the loading dock at Milner or shelving at Mill Woods, we can all contribute. We need to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone. Dare to try something different by asking our customers what they like and what would work better. Get to know a customer you don't know very well.

Our approach to community-led work will include:

- Curiosity, empathy, passion, enthusiasm and honesty.
- Consulting with your managers and colleagues often to share ideas.
- Building relationships and truly getting to know our communities (both inside and outside our walls).
- Sharing your successes and consistently evaluating the success of your work.





What can I do in my role?

EXECUTIVE, DIRECTORS & MANAGERS

- Champion community-led work.
- Ask your teams to include community-led goals in their annual goals.
- Undertake community-led work by meeting with schools and other organizations to learn how EPL can work with them.
- Work with collaborator organizations to find ways to better support our customers and remove barriers.
- Provide the guidance and set the expectation that every staff member finds ways to be community-led.
- Continue to make community-led work a priority and an expectation at EPL.
- Have regular conversations with your team on what community-led means to them and ask how they plan to meet the needs of customers and remove barriers.
- Foster an open dialogue about community-led by engaging your colleagues in conversations about how they are connecting with our communities.
- Allow for flexible scheduling to accommodate community-led work.

LIBRARY SERVICES COORDINATORS

- Support staff in community-led work.
- Be as flexible as operationally feasible when scheduling to allow for community-led work.
- Maintain high visibility in the community. Get out there and meet your community.
- Connect with community groups inside and outside of the library walls.
- Join your Manager, Community Librarian and Library Assistants on visits in the community.
- Share what you know about your community with your colleagues.

LIBRARIANS

- Explain the community-led philosophy to your colleagues.
- Connect with community groups inside and outside of the library.
- Learn a new customer's name each week, then take it one step further and learn about their interests to find ways EPL can support them.
- Evaluate the work in your service point and in the community.



LIBRARY & CIRCULATION ASSISTANTS

- Ask questions. If you're unsure in your specific role how to connect with community members and remove barriers for customers, set aside time with your Manager and brainstorm solutions that work for you.
- Talk to your Community Librarian and your Manager about how you can get involved in community-led work at EPL. Be brave!
- Join your Community Librarian on visits in your community.
- Expand your outreach visits and celebrate what you're already doing. For example, after a YRCA presentation, engage the teacher in a conversation about barriers students encounter when accessing the library and ask them what's working well. Share what you learn with your Leadership Team.
- Empathize with your customers. Listen for what they really need; go beyond what they're asking for.
- Share your community-led stories with your colleagues. Talk about what we've done to make a difference for our customers.
- Participate in community events like audience participation movies.

ADULT PAGES AND STUDENT PAGES

- Ask questions. If you're unsure in your specific role how to connect with communities and remove barriers for customers, set aside time with your manager and brainstorm solutions that work for you.

- Act with curiosity. Seek to learn more about your customers and ask yourself if there's one small thing you could do to make them feel at home in our libraries. It could be something very simple: if you notice a mom with her baby, ask if they've attended Sing, Sign, Laugh and Learn. If not, provide the schedule at your branch.
- Often customers approach our Pages because you are in the stacks. You have good insight to customer needs and can share these with your managers.

SHARED SERVICES

- Smile and say hello to customers every day. It's just as important to build relationships with internal customers so they can pay it forward to our external customers.
- Be responsive to customer suggestions.
- Process all requests with care and speed. Support colleagues with clear and simple information.
- Support our culture of being open, friendly and community-led.
- Search for smart and intuitive ways to communicate with our customers.
- Be an advocate for the best interests of our customers in every piece of work you do, or project you support.
- Troubleshoot. If you foresee an issue that could potentially impact EPL's ability to provide good customer service, bring it to your Manager's attention.
- Visit branches around the city on a regular basis to get to know the staff and their needs.
- Deepen your understanding of community-led at EPL by doing a job shadow of a Community Librarian.
- Learn one new thing a month about the diverse communities served by our branches.

At EPL, we're a team.

Our success hinges on the combined efforts of everyone.

Every member of our team has the ability to help EPL meet the needs of Edmontonians to enable them to use our services to their full capacity. Community-led at EPL is about getting to know our communities and sharing what we learn from them so that we can make EPL even better. Together, we can make a difference.

If you have any questions about our community-led work or how you can contribute, talk to your manager today.

It's never too late to start and there's never an action too small.



