

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROPOSAL FOR PIONEER PARK COMMUNITY LIBRARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January, 2021, an exploration of the need to complete a community needs assessment for Pioneer Park Community Library was undertaken. With the hiring of a new manager after the retirement of a long-serving manager and the recent expansion of the Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre, the need to complete a community-level assessment was recognized. During a review, it was established that the rate of change that the community has experienced in the past decade as well as upcoming changes to the community and the library support the need to undertake an assessment project at this time.

This report serves as both an exploration of the need to complete an assessment as well as an evaluation of potential methods that will work in a library context to complete an assessment. The conclusion to choose the Doing it Right Model, a Canadian-specific model that was written for social service agencies combined with a collaborative approach where the library and the community centre work together to complete the assessment is explained in detail. Beyond that, a step-by-step summary of the community needs assessment steps based on the preferred model is also included to serve as a guideline for the community needs assessment committee.

INTRODUCTION

Pioneer Park Community Library is a branch of Kitchener Public Library (KPL). Opened in 1982, Pioneer Park Library is located in the Doon Pioneer Park community of Kitchener, Ontario and shares a building with the Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre (Kitchener Public Library, n.d.). In the intervening years since the opening of the library, the makeup and size of the

community has changed dramatically. Since the library has not undertaken a community needs assessment for Pioneer Park since its establishment, the decision was made to pursue the necessity of completing an assessment at this time and make recommendations for the best ways to complete it.

The city of Kitchener is experiencing a period of rapid growth and KPL is growing alongside the community to continue to meet the needs of the communities within the city. Kitchener is part of the Region of Waterloo, which also includes the cities of Waterloo and Cambridge plus the neighbouring Townships of Wilmot, Woolwich, Wellesley, and North Dumfries. In 2016, the population of Kitchener was 233,222 (Statistics Canada, n.d.). However, the three cities that make up the Region of Waterloo together grew by more than 10,000 people each year in the last five years (CTV News, 2021). Additionally, this rate of growth is expected to continue unabated for the foreseeable future (Sharpe, 2021).

In 2023, KPL is scheduled to open a new branch in the Southwest neighbourhood of Kitchener. This community is adjacent to the Doon Pioneer Park community and many of the current residents of the Southwest neighbourhood access library services at other KPL branches, including Pioneer Park Community Library. The KPL catchment map for the city of Kitchener once the new branch opens can be seen in Appendix I.

As a result of the rapid growth of the community and the opening of a new community library adjacent to the Pioneer Park Library catchment, it is essential that KPL undertakes a community needs assessment for the Doon Pioneer Park community. The goals of the assessment will be:

1. Identify current library customers

2. Identify non-customers
3. Determine the needs of both current customers and non-customers
 - a. Identify which needs the library is able to meet and prioritize them
4. Assess which needs are being met by current programs and services
5. Develop a plan to meet needs that are not being met by current programs and services

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

A community needs assessment is a tool utilized by non-profit organizations, social service providers, government agencies and businesses alike to assess the needs of their customers, constituents or the communities they serve. Regardless of the type of organization conducting the assessment, the purpose of undertaking an assessment is to identify the needs of current and potential customers and stakeholders so that the organization can develop plans to meet those needs where possible. A need can be defined as a problem that needs to be solved, a gap or lack in service provision, and/or a perceived discrepancy of some kind (Altschuld and Kumar, 2010; Sleezer, 2014). Needs can include the wants and preferences of individuals or groups within a community (Council, E. S. P., 2009). According to Sleezer (2014), the purpose of a community needs assessment is to:

1. Solve a current problem
2. Avoid a past or current problem
3. Create or take advantage of a future opportunity
4. Provide learning, development, or growth

When choosing to do a community needs assessment, one of the first steps is to identify the people whose needs will be taken into consideration. These can include current customers, non-customers the library would like to attract to the organization, community partners and more. Lynn Westbrook asserts that “identifying and understanding people who do not use the library is the single most crucial purpose of any needs assessment” (LaFlamme, 2007, p. 56). This list will also include the organizational needs that will be necessary to meet the identified community needs that come out of the assessment. It is important to consider that the focus of an assessment is not on the needs of any one individual but on the needs of the community as a whole (Banerjee et al, 2016; Boiarsky, 2004; LaFlamme, 2007; Sleezer, 2014).

Conducting a community needs assessment requires the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, using both sources that are available to the service provider and seeking direct input from the community using methods such as surveys and focus groups. Once the data is collected, it needs to be analyzed, categorized into the different types of needs that are identified and prioritized based on the overall goals of the organization (Altschuld, 2010; Council, E. S. P., 2009; Sleezer, 2014). In order for an assessment to be successful, it must lead to changes within the organization that will result in meeting the identified needs.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT MODELS CONSIDERED FOR THIS PROJECT

Four models of community needs assessments were considered for this proposal. They are:

1. Altschuld and Witkin 3-Phase Model
2. Doing it Right Model

3. Stakeholder Participatory Model
4. Community-Led Service Planning Model

Altschuld and Witkin 3-Phase Model

In the Altschuld and Witkin 3-Phase Model (Altschuld and Kumar, 2010), a community needs assessment is divided into three distinct phases; pre-assessment, assessment and post-assessment. Pre-assessment involves getting organized and identifying potential areas of concern. In this stage, the organization also identifies and works with existing data to establish what is already known about the organization, the community and the current relationship between them. Assessment expands on this by collecting new information and data. An evaluation of the types of needs that are identified by the existing data and new data gathered is conducted in this stage and initial priorities are set. Post-assessment involves developing and implementing the programs and services to meet the needs that have been identified and prioritized. Once these decisions have been made and a new service plan based on the assessment has been implemented, evaluating the results of the changes to existing solutions or implementation of new solutions is also part of this stage.

Doing it Right Model

The Doing it Right Model was developed by the Edmonton Social Planning Council (2009). This model breaks the community needs assessment process down into six steps plus two pre-assessment steps. These pre-assessment steps are designed for the organization to first evaluate if they truly want or need to do a full assessment and whether they have access to the

appropriate resources to conduct an assessment. Following the pre-assessment stages, the steps to complete an assessment using this model are:

1. Develop the objectives of the needs assessment
2. Design the needs assessment research plan
3. Choose the approach or approaches that will be used to gather the desired information.
4. Collect the information
5. Summarize and Report
6. Use the needs assessment results

Stakeholder Participatory Model

The Stakeholder Participatory Model offers a less prescriptive approach to community needs assessments. In a traditional community assessment, the evaluators perform the assessment on community members, but in the stakeholder participatory approach “the oversight for the evaluation is a joint effort between the evaluator and community members who sponsor the research” (Balaswamy and Dabelko, 2002, p. 56). The actual steps used to complete the assessment may be based on another approach, such as one of the previously listed models. In the Stakeholder Participatory Model, clear roles and responsibilities for each group of stakeholders need to be clearly detailed and the level of participation for each group needs to be “meaningful” (Balaswamy and Dabelko, 2002, p. 60). The stakeholders who should be included in the assessment are:

1. The personnel who are organizing, planning and running the assessment
2. Beneficiaries of the assessment

3. Community groups and members who may benefit from the assessment

Community-Led Service Planning Model

The Community-Led Service Planning Model is a complete departure from the traditional needs assessment process. In the community-led model, the needs assessment is not performed by a designated group within a specific timeline, following an agreed-upon process. Instead, its purpose is to meet the needs of socially excluded community members through ongoing outreach into the community (Muzerall, 2005; Williment, 2020). The first step before beginning community outreach is to complete a community asset map, which includes “community groups, including smaller grassroots organizations, institutions, agencies and community members who serve as resources to the community” (Muzerall, 2005, p. 266). The asset map allows librarians to identify community connections where the library could participate in existing program and service delivery to develop relationships with community members who access the services and resources through other community service providers (Williment, 2020). In this model, assessing community needs is an organic outcome of consistent relationship building with community members outside of the library’s walls.

RECOMMENDED MODELS FOR PIONEER PARK COMMUNITY LIBRARY

At this time, the preferred models for conducting a community needs assessment for the Pioneer Park Library is a combination of the Doing it Right Model with a limited Stakeholder Participatory Model. The Doing it Right Model was selected because it offers a simple, easy to follow workbook that makes it ideal for organizations that are going to complete their own

assessment, as is the case in this instance. The workbook includes step-by-step instructions, easy to understand case studies and task sheets that allow for the successful organization and implementation of an assessment. Another important factor in this decision is that the model was created specifically for social service agencies, such as public libraries and takes into account the unique challenges that these service providers face. The addition of this workbook being developed within a Canadian context is also a positive motivation in choosing it for this project.

While the Stakeholder Participatory Model may not generally be necessary for the completion a community needs assessment by a public library, in the case of Pioneer Park Library, it is recommended that the community needs assessment be completed with the active participation of Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre. Since the two service providers share a common space and serve the same members of the community, it is important that the two organizations work together to determine the needs of the community and develop a plan to jointly meet the identified needs. This will allow for greater cohesion in the programs and services being offered and reduce the risk of offering overlapping services.

Additionally, for the library to effectively meet the needs of the entire community, it will also need to implement a community-led service plan to identify socially excluded members of the community whose needs will not be adequately assessed by a traditional community needs assessment. While a detailed plan on how the library should approach outreach opportunities is beyond the scope of this report, a preliminary community asset map was completed to determine if a community-led service plan is warranted for this community. This assessment

has identified four service organizations that offer services to vulnerable populations who are either unable or unlikely to access in-library programs and services. These organizations are:

- Grand Valley Institution for Women
 - Minimum-security prison (Correctional Services Canada, n.d.)
- Doon Village Retirement Residence
 - Offers independent living, assisted living and respite care (Sienna Senior Living, n.d.)
- Innisfree House
 - Hospice providing palliative care (Lissard & Innisfree Hospice, n.d.)
- Sunbeam Lodge
 - Residential treatment centre for developmentally challenged and medically fragile individuals (isearchmycommunity, 2020)

STEPS NEEDED TO COMPLETE A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As mentioned above, the preferred model for completing a community needs assessment for Pioneer Park Library is the Doing it Right model. Before beginning the assessment process, KPL will need to identify the staff members who will make up the community needs assessment team. The manager of Pioneer Park Community Library and the strategic planning librarian will co-lead the project and report to the deputy CEO. If KPL elects, as recommended, to involve the Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre in the assessment, coordination with the community centre will need to happen prior to beginning the assessment. For the project to be considered as including stakeholder participation, the

community centre administration will need to be involved with the project through all levels of the process. KPL and the community centre will need to establish agreed upon outcome goals, timelines and processes for the assessment. Following that model, the project will be broken down into the six steps outlined in *Doing it Right: A Needs Assessment Workbook* (2009).

Step 1: Develop the objectives of the needs assessment

A community needs assessment is both a time consuming and labour intensive undertaking. To ensure that all the resources allocated to the project are used to their full potential, it is vitally important that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of what the desired outcomes of the assessment are (Council, E. S. P., 2009, p. 5). Before beginning, KPL will need to decide whether to undertake an initial assessment of the needs of current customers, to focus solely on non-customers or to assess the needs of both at the same time. Choosing a more narrow focus will make the needs assessment process simpler and less expensive initially, but will result in redundancies when a further assessment is undertaken at a later time. For that reason, it is recommended that KPL proceed with a full community needs assessment of both customers and non-customers of the library. However, taking into consideration that the current catchment boundaries will be altered by the opening of the Southwest Community Library, it is further recommended to complete the assessment based on what the Pioneer Park Library catchment will be once the new branch has opened.

Step 2: Design the needs assessment research plan

In this step, the focus is on determining what information the library hopes to collect during the assessment and identifying where that information can be found (Council, E. S. P.,

2009, p. 12). The assessment team will need to decide what approach or approaches to gathering information will be employed. The five most common approaches are: social indicators, service use, key informant survey, community groups, and field survey (Council, E. S. P., 2009, p. 17). The most effective assessments utilize multiple approaches to gathering information, choosing between both qualitative and quantitative methods. At this stage, it is important to create all the structures that will be used to complete the assessments. This includes deciding on timelines and assigning duties to the library staff and community stakeholders who will be completing the assessment.

Step 3: Collect the information

Quantitative data

Quantitative data is available through a variety of both internal and external sources. KPL collects customer use data which allows for the detailed analysis of historical usage patterns of existing customers. Collecting and analyzing that information will allow the assessment committee to identify changes in the use of library services and attendance in library services. This will allow them to extrapolate how needs have changed over time and look for signs of programs and services that no longer meet customer needs in the way that they may once have done. This information will also be valuable in comparing how current programs and services compare to the community needs that will be identified through the assessment. This will allow the library to make important decisions around which programs and services to keep and which ones to eliminate.

Quantitative data will also allow the library to understand the demographic makeup of the Doon Pioneer Park community. Information gathered at all levels of government as well as by other community organizations should be used to develop a deeper understanding of who the members of the community are at the group level. These sources include:

- City of Kitchener
 - Available on <https://open-kitchenergis.opendata.arcgis.com/>
 - Doon South Community Plan
https://app2.kitchener.ca/appdocs/communityplans/PublishedCurrentText//Doon_South_Community_Plan.pdf
- Region of Waterloo
 - Available on <https://rowopendata-rmw.opendata.arcgis.com/>
 - CYPT Wellness survey
 - *A Community Fit for Children* – Third Edition
- Government of Canada
 - 2016 census data
 - Next census will take place in May 2021
- Waterloo Region District School Board
 - Boundary studies past and current
- Waterloo Catholic District School Board
 - Boundary studies past and current

Qualitative data

Collecting qualitative information is far more time consuming and costly than quantitative data, however, it is a vital part of the community needs assessment process. While statistics help to understand the community in the broad sense, seeking input from individual community members allows the library to develop strong connections with the community and “to meet culturally specific information needs that might otherwise have gone overlooked” (LaFlamme, 2007, p. 60). In chapter 5 of the *Doing it Right* workbook (2009), the authors provide a detailed account of the three main ways to collect quantitative data. These include: mail-out questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews. They list each way that qualitative information may be sought and lists the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. A comprehensive review of that chapter is recommended when completing this stage of the assessment to determine which approaches will best suit the library.

Step 4: Summarizing and Reporting

It is important to acknowledge that by the time the assessment committee gets to this stage in the process, there are some inherent challenges that the process will potentially be faced with. The first is that it is hard to stay motivated over the course of a long process (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010). Additionally, the staff and community members who began the process may not be the same group of people who complete the process. The team will have to work together to ensure that the same diligence goes into this stage as in the planning and implementation stages of the assessment. The format of the final report will have been decided in the initial stages of the project and the task at this stage will be to analyze, sort and interpret all of the

data and information gathered. According to the *Doing it Right* workbook (2009, p. 28), the report should be made available to all staff and community stakeholders who will be impacted by the findings and should include the following sections:

- Executive Summary and Recommendations
- Purposes of the Study (Why it was done)
- Background (How it came about)
- Methodology (How the study was done)
 - Approaches chosen
 - The method used to collect information
 - Description of work done
- Research Findings
- Analysis and Discussion of Findings
- Recommendations

Step 6: Using the needs assessment results

In many ways, this final step is arguably the most important part of the community needs assessment. If the efforts taken to complete the assessment do not lead to organizational change and an adjustment to the programs and services being offered by the library, all the time and resources that went into completing the project will have not served their intended purpose. Once the report has been written, the library will need to determine how best to proceed. It is impossible to predict what the outcomes of a needs assessment will be in detail, but the general outcome will see that some programs and services will need to be

eliminated as they no longer meet the community's needs, some programs and services will continue with no or only minor adjustments to continue meeting the community's needs, and new programs and services will need to be designed and implemented to meet identified community needs that are not currently being met (LaFlamme, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Pioneer Park Community Library is a vital part of the cohesion of the Doon Pioneer Park community that surrounds it. Despite its small size, it serves many functions, from providing access to information, pleasure reading materials and technology to being a safe space for members of the community to meet, study, attend programs, and much more. As with all libraries, resources are limited and it is essential that all programs and services are designed to actively meet the identified needs of the community. To properly identify those needs, it is essential that the library undertakes a community needs assessment at this time. While periodically completing assessments is an important part of ensuring that the library remains current and in step with the changing needs of its community, the present circumstances support the particular necessity of completing an assessment as soon as possible. These circumstances are the rapid growth the community has experienced in the last decade and the expectation that this level of growth will continue, combined with the opening of a new KPL branch in 2023, which will change the size and composition of the Pioneer Park Library catchment.

APPENDIX I

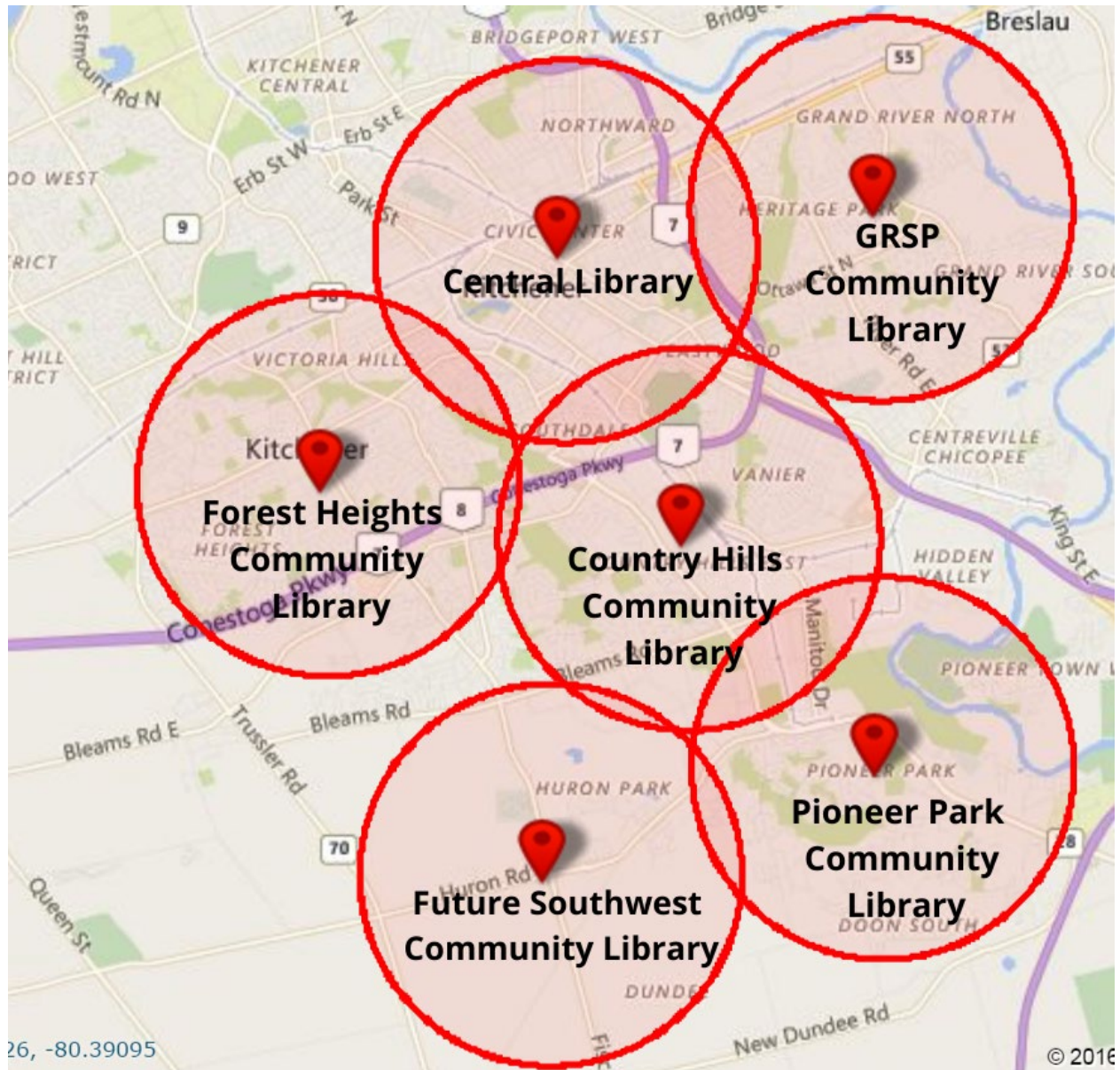


Image used with permission from Kitchener Public Library. Provided by Penny-Lynn Fielding, Deputy CEO via private email correspondence.

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