

CREATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

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Ideas you can use: Asset Matching

Community residents, and the organizations to which they belong, often overlook opportunities to communicate, coordinate or assist each other.

In the summer of 2004, Shabbeer Shaik surveyed 15 county Extension Agents and 39 librarians located in southeastern Kansas. This work is part of a grant funded project ran by K-State Research and Extension. This project is named Community Development@Your Library and is a partnership between a group of interested agencies spearheaded by the Kansas State Library, the Southeast Kansas Library System and K-State Research and Extension. The *mission* of the partners in this project is to form an alliance that is committed to expanding the capacity of libraries in two areas: (1) community and economic development and (2) small business and entrepreneurship.

The following are some of the findings. County Extension Educators often are in contact with librarians and library board members. Also, librarians refer information seekers to their county Extension Office, but Extension Educators seldom partner with the local libraries in their county on educational programs focused on CD, ED, small business or entrepreneurial activity. The survey of all 15 county Extension offices and 15 Extension educators in the southeast uncovered six summer reading programs, two nutrition programs, one time management program and four other miscellaneous programs. Seven surveyed Extension agents had no ongoing Extension programs with their local public library.

Family and Consumer Science Extension Agents partner with the local libraries most

often in the summer. However, this opportunity seems to be a win-win strategy year round. For

example, libraries can store and make available Extension and research publication, CDs, websites and a list of experts in the K-State Research and Extension system. See the full details of the survey of 15 Extension agents on the web at www.agecon.ksu.edu/ddarling on the **Extension Resources** page.

Table 1: Extension programs with libraries

Activities	Number of counties
Summer reading programs	6
Nutrition programs	2
Time management program	1
Health class	1
Heritage program	1
Kids cooking video	1
No current programs	7

Source: Shaik and Darling (August 2004). C.D. Study Report # 226. Manhattan: K-State Research and Extension.

Next, librarians were asked about working with the local business community. Most librarians are willing, able and interested, but they don't always get an opportunity because they don't get a positive response from outreach efforts the librarians make to the local business community and the agencies representing them. Sixteen out of 39 (41%) surveyed librarians reported that the lack of interest from local agencies representing the business community was either a somewhat important or a very important barrier to better serving community and economic development oriented clients and small business clients. The situation also can be reversed. Librarians sometime do not perceive an opportunity to play a bigger role in the economic life of their community.

Table 2: Perceived barriers to successfully better serving the business community

Types of barriers	Not relevant	Somewhat	Very Relevant
1. Lack of familiarity with business terminology on the part of library staff.	77%	10%	13%
2. Lack of familiarity with specific resources or materials that business patrons request.	72%	10%	18%
3. Acquiring adequate budgets to purchase business related materials requested.	59%	15%	26%
4. Having sufficient staff trained to meet the demands.	72%	13%	15%
5. The high cost of acquiring business materials given the low usage.	74%	3%	23%
6. Lack of interest from local agencies representing the business community.	59%	18%	23%

Source: Shaik and Darling(August 2004). CD Study Report # 227. Manhattan: K-State Research and Extension.

One of the most imported steps in community building is asset mapping. Uncovering under utilized assets leads to discovering missed opportunities. This step leads to a more robust community development program. Finally, the economic development program can match local resources with outside resources to support a strategic plan. By combining both local and outside resources, a strategic plan will be more able to resolve key issues and realize important goals.

A Pearl Collection: *Community development focuses on internal improvements. Economic development focuses on external investors, tourists, convention sponsors, and shoppers. Community economic development focuses on the future - building a more prosperous place for all stakeholders.*



Produced by David L. Darling, Community Development Economist on the web at www.agecon.ksu.edu/ddarling

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