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## Appendix F

### What Makes A Difference?

It didn't take long to develop the view that "what makes a difference?" isn't the size of the community. Regardless of community size, there are libraries that are thriving and surviving and libraries that are struggling and dying.

Our staff spent some time talking about "what makes a difference." To add to this discussion, we considered a list of factors that was developed by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development.

Through their research and work with communities, the Heartland Center developed a list of "Clues to Rural Community Survival." Those 20 clues seem to match up well with observations about library success and survival. The following clues are adapted from the Heartland Center's work and applied to small and rural libraries.

1. *Evidence of community (library) pride* – If pride in the library and its mission and roles is lacking, the library is on rocky ground. Pride needs to register from the staff, board, friends, community members and leaders. Does the library in its look and feel demonstrate pride? In thriving communities, there is evidence of the community's respect for its history and culture.
2. *Emphasis on quality in business (library) and community life* – Is value reflected in the library? Is there enough apparent care to show that the library is valued and worth the cost investment?
3. *Willingness to invest in the future* – Do community leaders and residents think to the future in making choices about the library and its value to children and future generations? Is there a willingness to commit community resources (financial and other) toward the library's future?
4. *Participatory approach to community (library) decision-making* – Is there evidence of community participation and involvement in decisions concerning the library? How well do library leaders connect with community representatives in planning for library services?
5. *Cooperative Community Spirit* – There is evidence of cooperative activity, community members working together rather than fighting over what to do, how, and by whom. There are disagreements along the way, but work moves forward toward achievement of shared goals. Is library support and use broad based? Is a positive community spirit evident in issues that involve the library? Are community members willing to commit the time to do important things?
6. *Realistic appraisal of future opportunities* – Attention is given to building on assets and minimizing weaknesses. Choices are made based on realistic considerations.

7. *Awareness of competitive positioning* – Attention is given to libraries in other towns with an eye toward learning from their experiences and leveraging local resources.
8. *Knowledge of the physical environment* – There is understanding of and appropriate and effective use made of the community’s physical environment. The library is also valued as a “place.” Though, the physical environment is only part of this idea of “place.” Is the library a place that community members want to be? Libraries built in recent years have witnessed significant increases in their usage. They are places that people want to come and spend time. Older library buildings can and have achieved this feeling of comfort by giving thought, care and effort toward making the library a comfortable, friendly, and inviting setting.
9. *Active economic (library) development plan* – There is an active and organized approach to community library development. Library development is pursued within the framework of overall community and economic development.
10. *Deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders* – It is typical in successful communities to have both formal and informal means for established leaders to bring new recruits into public service. What involvement is there of young people in library development? For that matter, all age levels? There is an emphasis on making children feel welcome and there is a noticeable rapport between library staff and youth.
11. *Acceptance of women in leadership roles* – Here, libraries lead the way. But to what extent are women in library leadership roles involved in broader community leadership roles? In contrast, what is the involvement of men in library leadership roles?
12. *Strong belief in and support of education* – Communities that thrive recognize the importance of education beyond the K-12 system. They support efforts toward lifelong learning. Libraries are integral to lifelong learning – providing services for preschool children, children and youth, adults, and the elderly. The library has well developed partnerships with community and area schools, and other educational institutions.
13. *Problem-solving approach to health care* – Public libraries have much to offer in providing access to consumer health information. Consumer health information is highly sought through public libraries.
14. *Strong multi-generational family orientation* – Public libraries in thriving communities have a strong family orientation evident within the library’s service and program offerings.
15. *Strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life* – Thriving communities have a solid core of community organizations such as churches, civic organizations, schools, and libraries.
16. *Sound and well-maintained infrastructure* – This includes the physical structures (streets, water systems, utilities, with on-going and effective up-keep). This also includes broadband telecommunications services available to citizens, businesses, schools, and libraries.

17. *Careful use of fiscal resources* – Thriving communities spend money carefully, but also with a sense that expenditures will be made for important community purposes. They also spend money with the long-term view toward the community's future. Money will be found for those things that are important to the community.
18. *Sophisticated use of information resources* – Successful communities have an extensive record of data, information, and knowledge about the community. Importantly, there is both awareness and effort to systematically compile and maintain the community's information assets in a variety of formats. The library has an active role and a central purpose in managing the community's information assets.
19. *Willingness to seek help from the outside* – The best communities know where they can reach for outside assistance and resources. They are tapped in to the full range of resources and services. Again, the public library has a central role in supporting access to outside resources through its informational and communications capabilities. Libraries are very good at resource sharing. Successful libraries have expanded the definition of sharing through innovative approaches.
20. *Conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself* – While outside resources are needed, when all is said and done a community's future is in the hands of those who live there. It takes leaders and followers to work together to build a surviving and thriving community. A successful library has a librarian who is a trusted and valued member of the community. Further, a successful public library has board, friends group, and foundation membership that are broadly involved in community activities and respected within and outside the community.

Every community, every library, can assess its strengths and weaknesses by preparing a self-assessment. Whether pluses or minuses are used, a numbering scale, or anecdotes, all twenty of these characteristics can be gauged to reveal what's working well and what needs improvement.