



What is Community Self-Indexing?

Every community is made up of individual members, each with a unique collection of “personal resources” (skills, professions, opinions, desires, ideas, needs, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, experience and so on). Community self-indexing is a particular way of revealing these personal resources to others within the community.

Within any community, some of these personal resources are already known and shared through the course of normal human interaction. But in today's world, some communities are too large for us to get to know everybody well. Or, we are too busy to spend a lot of time developing friendships—even though we might like to. Or, sometimes, needs come upon us suddenly, and we do not have the time or wherewithal to discover relevant resources within the community.

Community self-indexing is a way to extend and deepen the personal networks within our communities, to document the personal resources that people would like to share, and to increase the “social capital” of the community.

The idea is simple. Invite community members to share information about themselves with the rest of the community, in a safe, convenient and respectful way. To do this effectively, community self-indexing should:

- be absolutely **voluntary**
- ensure participants that their information will not be used inappropriately (e.g., if it's not supposed to go beyond the community, then it doesn't)
- allow people to enjoy the level of privacy that they need to express themselves freely
- be easily available and easy to use
- allow people to express their own information in their own words
- treat all participants and all Entries equally

CommuniShare is one tool that communities can use for community self-indexing. But community self-indexing can also be accomplished without CommuniShare, and without any computer technology at all. It can be done with a loose-leaf notebook, or a box of 3x5 cards. What is important is not the technology, but the commitment to facilitate free expression and sharing among members.

Community self-indexing can yield many benefits for both the individual members as well as for the community:

- New, shy or remote members have a safe and easy way “jump in” to the community.
- Members feel empowered to express themselves, and feel that their interests and experiences are validated.
- Members get more of their needs met within the context of the community.
- Members make connections with one another, establishing (and deepening) relationships.
- Members discover and appreciate the breadth and depth of the community they are a part of—whether or not they've actually contributed to the index or made any connections.

Community Self-Indexing in action:

In the early 1980's the Ridley Township (PA) Public Library tried an experiment. Patrons were invited to fill in a simple paper form, declaring that they would like to learn, teach or share something (anything).

A librarian then took the forms, applied appropriate classification terms and created distinctly colored catalog cards which were then interfiled into the library's main card catalog.

Within several months, with virtually no promotion, the Learning Network (as it was called) began to take off.

- Some people offered to teach French cuisine, stress control for women, genealogy, and reading for the vision-impaired.
- People expressed a desire to learn salesmanship, German and ham radio.
- Others wanted to share their interests in playing bridge, Bermuda, home births, and the early families of Ridley Park.
- One woman who came from Montreal wanted to invite people to speak French over lunch because she missed her native tongue.
- A childhood pal of James Michener wanted to share stories about his lifelong friend.
- One man wanted to discuss his contention that the Federal income tax is voluntary.
- Another wanted to start a “vegetarian exchange”.
- And someone else wanted to trade dress patterns.

It was like a floodgate of skills, interests and experiences within the local community suddenly opened up. Was it because the library patrons suddenly acquired these resources and desires? Was there a sudden urge on so many people's parts to share what they knew or could do? Was Ridley Township unique in the incredible richness of its residents?

The answer to all of these questions is No.

Ridley Township is a fine community. But every community (whether defined by geography or by some other criteria) is composed of people who contain a rich—and usually surprising—collection of interests and desires. This is, in fact, one of the most valuable assets that any community may possess.

What was absent before the Learning Network was introduced to the Ridley Township Public Library, and what is absent from most of the communities we are parts of today, is a safe, convenient and respectful method for people to share these “personal resources” within their community.

contributed to the index or made any connections.

- By virtue of an increased number and diversity of interconnections among members, the “fabric” of the community becomes more tightly woven, and the community is stronger as a result.
- As members feel more connected to one another, they are likely to identify more strongly with the community, which may result in furthering the community’s overall goals and objectives.

Read more about community self-indexing: [community_self-indexing.pdf](#) (91KB
- Adobe Acrobat Reader file)

(Acrobat PDF files require the free [Adobe Reader](#) software.)

Community self-indexing is such a method. And CommuniShare can make it easy.

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