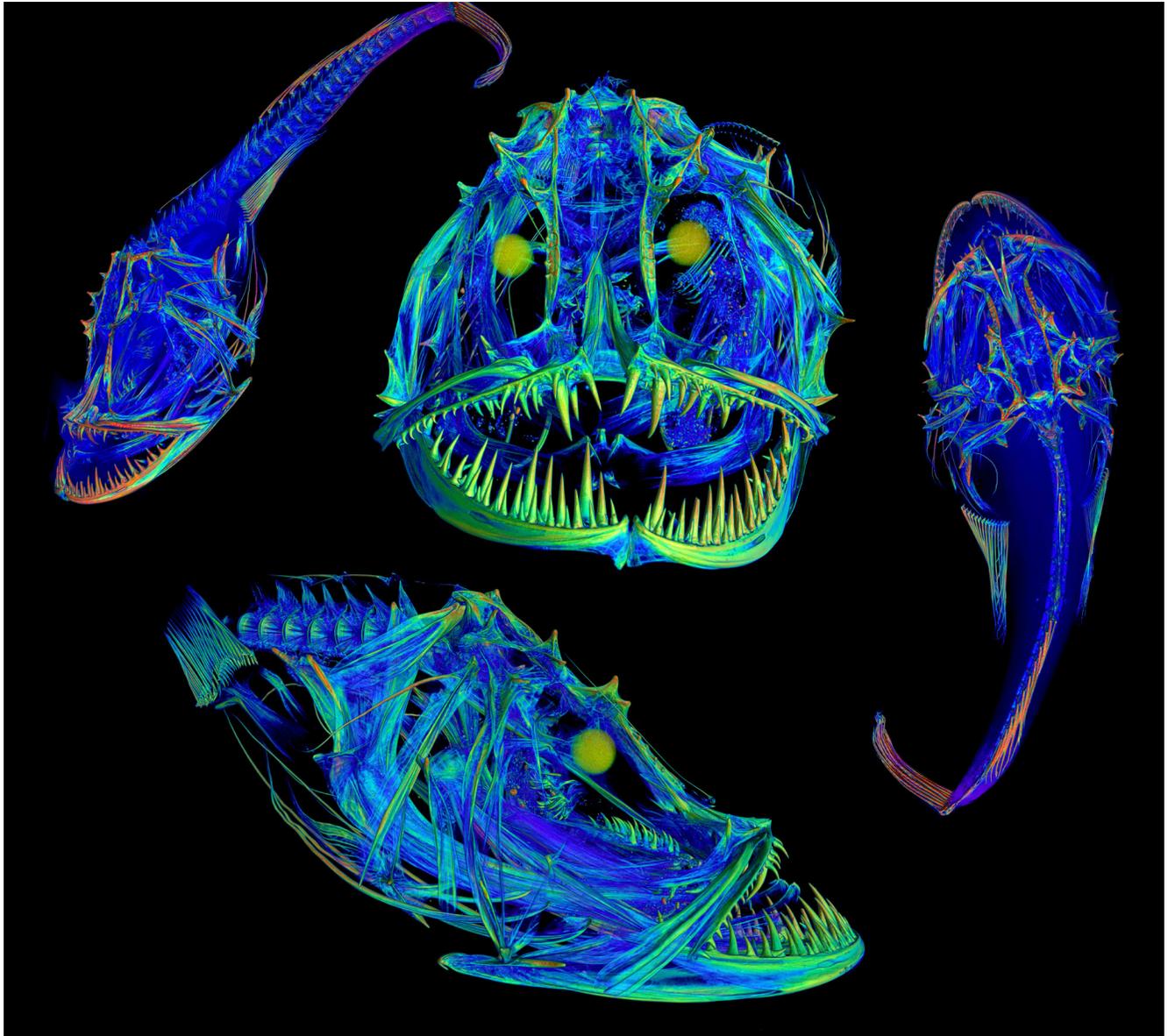


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**INSIDE: NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS AS PART OF
NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

PLUS: THE “JULIANA CODEX”, A ROADMAP TO NAGPRA
REPATRIATION, AND MORE!

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COMMUNITY DIALOGUES IN INFORMAL SCIENCE INSTITUTIONS: STRATEGIES TO WORK WITH UNDERSERVED AUDIENCES, ACTIVATE NEW PARTNERSHIPS, AND CREATE A MORE WELCOMING INSTITUTION

By Anne Holland and Paul Dusenbery

A STEM learning ecosystem (Traphagen and Traill, 2014) includes the formal education system, afterschool programs, and the informal education sector (such as science museums and public libraries). A healthy system is one in which all these elements work collaboratively to maximize their collective impact to benefit the whole community. If you've attended any informal STEM education (ISE) conference in the last 5 years, you've undoubtedly heard the term "Collective Impact" buzzing around on the tip of everyone's tongue. Collective Impact requires organizations across all sectors to work together to solve a pressing and complex social issue (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Institutions who've started with collective impact as a goal often find themselves overwhelmed, unable to identify a common agenda, locate the right partners, or even truly feel they should have ownership as a "backbone organization." We present a more realistic approach to start to think about collective impact, by addressing building a Common Agenda, and fostering Communications through a Community Dialogue Framework. (See chart below for key components of Collective Impact.)



Figure 1: Five key elements of Collective Impact. (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

Informal learning institutions often have goals (and even more often, mandates) of reaching out to underserved and underrepresented audiences, while also soliciting user feedback about their venue and programs (Zeigler, 2015; Acevedo and Dusenbery, 2017). Unfortunately, some community members do not feel welcome in these institutions, or even worse, may not know they exist or are open to the public (c.f., Acevedo and Madara, 2015). Working closely with public libraries across the country, the STAR Library Network (STAR Net) has developed a Community Dialogue Framework to assist public libraries in reaching new patrons, becoming an even more welcoming institution, and building new partnerships (Holland, 2015; Holland and Dusenbery, 2018). While this framework was developed for libraries, there is compelling evidence that it could be useful for science centers, museums, zoos, aquariums, and other informal learning institutions.



Figure 2: A Community Dialogue event at a public library. Credit: African American Research Library and Cultural Center.

To date, more than 100 libraries across the country have adopted the *Community Dialogue Framework* to better understand how they can increase or modify their STEM programs and services for underserved and underrepresented populations, while at the same time building partnerships with like-minded organizations in their communities. The National Center for Interactive Learning at the Space Science Institute has developed this framework with funding from the National Institutes of Health (Discover Health/Descubre la Salud), the National Science Foundation (Project BUILD; STAR Net Phase 2), and NASA's Science Mission Directorate (*NASA@ My Library*).

Community Dialogues (CDs) are informal, flexible conversations between staff at the convening institution and leaders in the local community. Unlike focus groups, where you may be testing a product or a new idea, these Dialogues instead aim to gauge your community's opinions about the value of your institution, the services your community wants and needs, and how your institution can work effectively with other community organizations to effect positive change. It requires two-way communication. CDs have many similarities to the Harwood Approach and elements of the "Libraries Transforming Communities" initiative developed by the American Library Association (in fact, some items, such as the "Ground Rules" for CD events, were graciously borrowed from the Harwood Model.) (American Library Association, 2015; Harwood, 2015). These two initiatives came into being around the same time, and while they have some differences, they share the same goal to reach outward into one's community to address important timely topics (such as STEM participation in the community) and including traditionally underserved, underrepresented, and socio-economically disadvantaged audiences. CDs typically last 2-3 hours, and the *Community Dialogue Framework Guide* provides some suggestions for questions to get institutions started with this approach. These questions are centered around STEM equity in the community (such as asking, "How can the community help our library build on its strengths and bring STEM learning to all audiences?") and often serve as stage setting conversations for future CDs.

REACH OUT, ENGAGE, AND LEARN FROM YOUR COMMUNITY

The CD strategy was developed as part of the National Institutes of Health-funded Discover Health/Descubre la Salud exhibition program in Colorado that utilized extensive community input to design a health-based exhibition relevant for the Spanish-speaking community in Colorado. These early Dialogues at eight Colorado libraries involved a staff member from NCIL, library staff, and members of the Colorado Area Health Education Centers. Some venues began inviting more community members to these conversations (such as tribal leaders, immigrant services, local physicians, and teachers), and the project team realized that the Dialogue framework was far richer and more valuable than we had initially realized. Because of these conversations, Discover Health libraries created new signage, began new programs with local tribes, and gained dozens of new partners.

The Framework was further refined as part of the NSF-funded Project BUILD and the NASA-funded NASA@ My Library programs. Several resources and supports were developed in this iteration including creating a guide for

participating libraries (again, borrowing material from the Harwood Model, as well as using lessons learned from our own programs), expanding the suggested invitee list, and assisting libraries in creating plans to follow up on the requests, suggestions about programming, and lessons learned from previous Dialogues.

For more information, visit: <http://www.starnetlibraries.org/resources/community-dialogues/>



Figure 3: A discussion at a Community Dialogue at the Chippewa River District Library. Credit: Chippewa River District Library.

A common question is "what are the main differences between the Harwood Approach, the Community Dialogue Framework, and other initiatives that seek to foster dialogue between ISE institutions and their communities?" The chart below illustrates some of the key aspects of the Harwood and Community Dialogue approaches (and also serves again to highlight that these initiatives all share similar goals, and pieces of each model may be appropriate for different venues.)

What we've found is that libraries (and all ISE venues) really do want to meaningfully interact with their underserved populations and they want to respond to board mandates (and will need to in order to stay relevant). But what they are lacking is time. We truly believe that if every ISE venue could take the time to go through the pieces of the Harwood Approach for community engagement and make an honest effort to complete the self-assessments and dialogue exercises, we would be seeing major changes being enacted in communities of all sizes and populations across the country. But as we all know, the time and staffing necessary to undertake such a high stakes effort are some of the biggest things ISE venues are sorely lacking.

COMMUNITY DIALOGUES AS A STEPPING STONE

We believe the Community Dialogue Framework, with its focus on enhancing STEM learning opportunities, building

Figure 4: Comparing the Harwood Model of community engagement with the Community Dialogue Framework.

Model	Goal	Method	Time Required	Drawbacks
Harwood Approach	Reaching out into the community by “Turning Outward” to better understand your community and bring about positive change	Highly scripted model including an honest assessment of your organization and policies, coupled with multiple Community Conversations (with individual community members.)	Up to a few months to complete all steps, but an ongoing process	The required preparation and many steps may deter time limited organizations. The broad nature of the possible community concerns may also be challenging.
Community Dialogue Framework	Informal dialogues with community leaders who can work with ISE institutions to establish a vibrant and inclusive STEM Learning Environment	Loosely facilitated Dialogues with community leaders who have a pulse on the needs and desires of their constituents	One dialogue is required to get started (which takes 1-2 months to plan), though many venues continue the process	While simple and easy to plan, the ease may come at the cost of “next steps” at an institutional level being unclear

partnerships, and letting leaders in your community help to make the big changes is a good middle ground. Seeing the positive changes a few conversations can bring may even allow organizations to devote the time and energy in the future to following the more extensive Harwood Model.

As the CD framework has evolved, we’ve realized that its flexibility is what makes it so easy for venues to use and adopt. Many of the libraries we worked with were only required to do one CD as part of their project, and we’ve seen them now do 2, 3, even up to 6 Dialogues in a very short time. Facilitators really just need to get people to their venue (or a neutral meeting place), and then the conversations flow naturally (and quickly). Charles Diede of the Fontana Library in California noted after his Dialogue that “Participants took off running. I was barely able to get questions in, but it was all good because by themselves they covered most of the questions!” Mary Jenkins, of the Clarksdale Carnegie Public Library in Mississippi, echoed that sentiment, saying that “This Dialogue was very useful in setting up collaborations. The attendees weren’t as keen on discussing issues as they were on talking and working together!”

Originally, the below goals developed for the Community Dialogues were meant to serve as a stepping off point for libraries including STEM in their programming, and their practice. We knew that libraries care deeply about their underserved communities, so it made sense to come at STEM equity from that perspective. We realize that these dialogues can focus on a locally relevant STEM issue (such as waterway pollution, air quality, or a lack of engineers),

they can also focus on social justice issues such as access to resources, making an ISE venue more welcoming to LGBTQ members, ethnic minorities or other groups, and even just finding out why people aren’t comfortable walking in the door.

Community Dialogue Goals:

1. Strengthen librarians’ role in establishing a STEM learning environment.
2. Identify underrepresented community groups.
3. Identify possible collaborations and partnerships within the community.
4. Contribute to developing a flexible Community Dialogue model that all informal STEM institutions can use.

What else have our libraries learned from these dialogues? One library realized that by only having bilingual programming on the weekend, they in effect shut out families



Figure 4 A small but impactful conversation among community leaders at the Clarksdale Carnegie Public Library. Credit: Clarksdale Carnegie Public Library.

whose parents had service industry jobs. Another library made concentrated efforts, based on the results of their dialogue, to be more welcoming to Spanish language residents, and in the process noticed new patrons from a variety of backgrounds walking in the door. Other libraries have started new programs (with new volunteers!) based on the results of the Dialogues.

NEXT STEPS

We invite you to consider conducting a Community Dialogue in your own ISE institution (and also adapting pieces of the Harwood framework into these dialogues!) SSI has created a Community Dialogue webpage, where informal learning institutions can access and modify the guides, templates and information provided to the libraries, (www.starnetlibraries.org/resources/community-dialogues/). You can learn more about some of the prompts and reflection pieces of the Harwood Approach here: http://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/LTCGettingStarted_DigitalWorkbook_final010915.pdf.

We look forward to hearing how your institution has adapted this framework for your community. We recommend that your public library be invited to your CD event, preferably in the early planning stages. Libraries have a pulse on community needs, access to community members, and are seen as a trusted community resource. Museums might consider hosting their Dialogues at a library, or other community venues to truly gather diverse opinions from the larger community. Be prepared to hear some hard truths. Not everyone will see your institution as welcoming. Some groups will require that you go to them, and others will need to hear from you many times to truly develop trust. Having an open mind and flexible plans, are key components to hosting a successful Dialogue.

Please feel welcome to utilize the resources shared on the site above. All that we ask in return is that you let us know how your event went by filling out the post Dialogue Reflection report, so that we can continue to adapt and improve this resource.

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ON THE COVER:

Pictured: A high-resolution computed tomography reconstruction of an Angler, *Lophius piscatoris*. Natural history specimens can be used to examine the inner structure of an animal without destroying it. Learning about unlocking the wealth of data held by natural history specimens by making them available in electronic form.

Full story on page 11.

