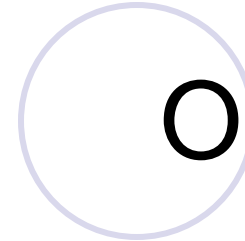
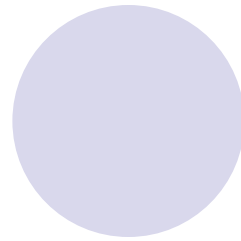
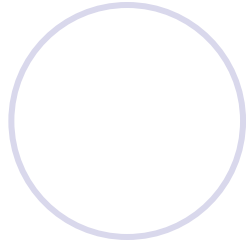
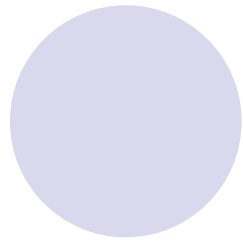


A row of four circles in the background. The first circle is white with a light purple outline. The second, third, and fourth circles are solid light purple.

Approaches for Understanding Community Information Use

A row of four circles in the background. The first, second, and third circles are solid light purple. The fourth circle is white with a light purple outline.

The Hartford Study



Outline

- Community information & civic engagement
- Why study Hartford?
- Research Methodology & Strategies

Community information & civic engagement



- **Community information & civic engagement**

- Greater context of this research: the role the public library plays in the *civic fabric* of a community
- Good example of “Pasteur’s Quadrant”

- Why Hartford?

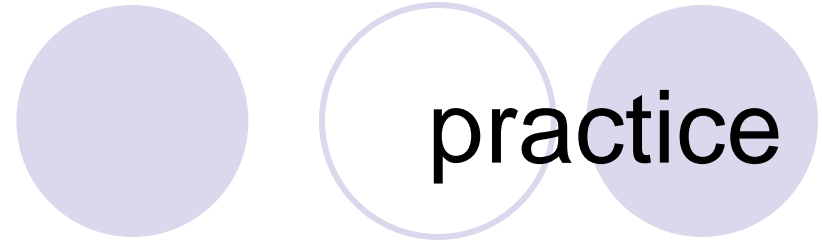
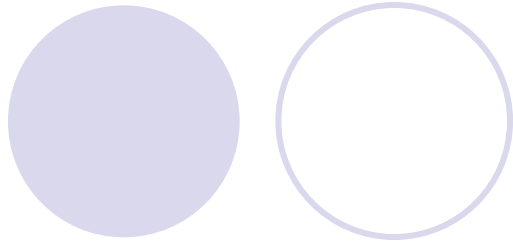
- Research Methodology & Strategies

A decorative graphic consisting of two rows of circles. The top row has a solid light purple circle on the left and an empty light purple circle outline on the right. The bottom row has a solid light purple circle on the left, an empty light purple circle outline in the middle, and a solid light purple circle on the right.

theory

If society claims to derive its legitimacy from ‘the consent of the governed,’ then it must offer each member the opportunity to participate in the activities of public life. To acknowledge the existence of conditions where some enjoy the opportunity to participate while others experience exclusion, full or partial, is to challenge the very claim to democracy that defines America.

- Jorge Reina Schement
“Imaging Fairness”



practice

We must make the connection between the library and people – issues like workforce preparedness, civic life, and equitable access to telecommunications. And while we do this, we at the library are gaining a new capacity and competency, which is what empowerment is really about: building skill and confidence.

- Louise Blalock
“Listen, Learn, Link”



merging theory & practice

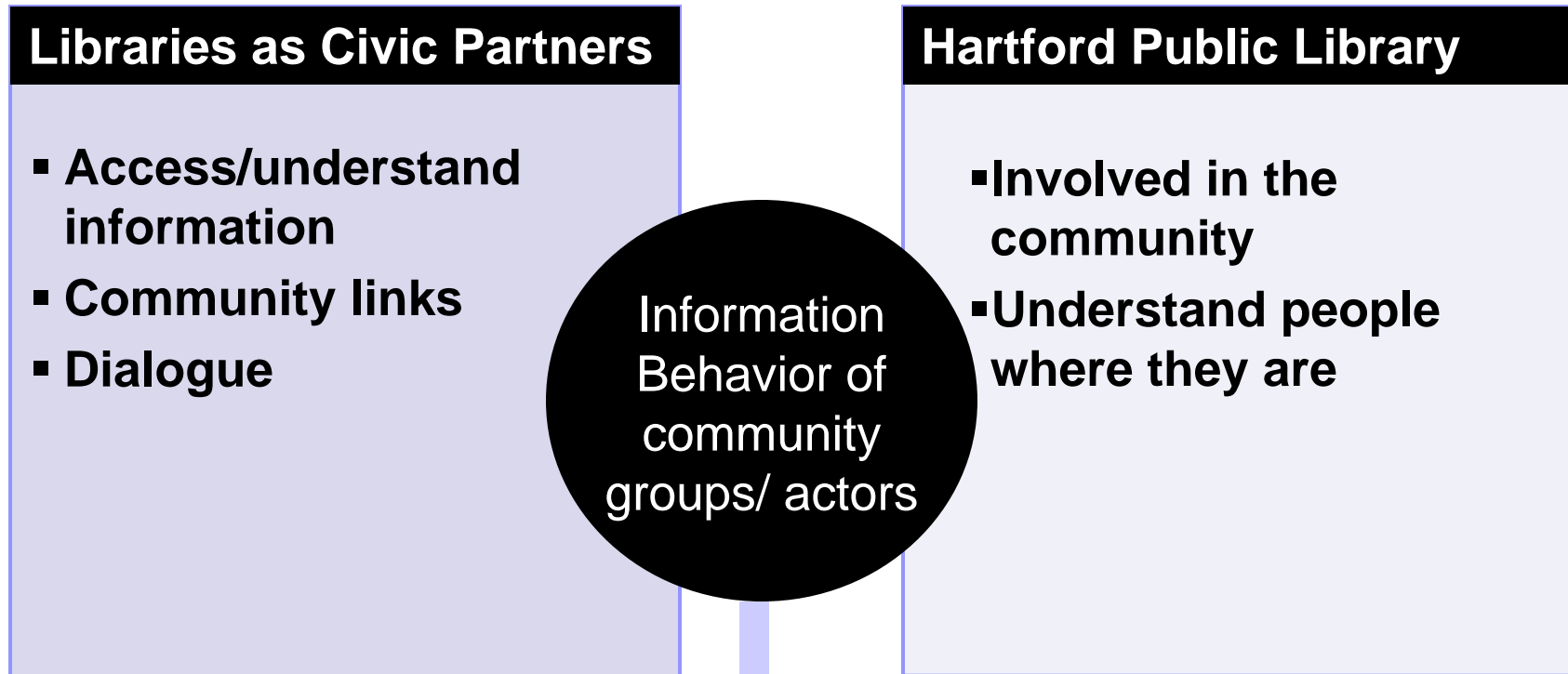
Libraries as Civic Partners

- **participation requires knowledge** – the exchange, access and understanding of information
- citizen participation & engagement is, in part, bound to each citizen's ability to use information for decision making and to **create community and civic links**

Hartford Public Library

- **Neighborhood Teams**
 - Librarian engagement in community
 - Librarians work inside neighborhoods and are participants in the neighborhood's problem solving process
 - Librarians are information advocates

research design: information behavior



There are lots of ways to try to understand the role libraries play in the civic fabric of a community. This research design focuses on the information behavior of community actors in Hartford and the connection HPL is making to those community actors.

The Hartford Study



- “Never before has it been so important for librarians to be able to show the impact of their services on the community. Approaches to determining impact have eluded librarians, in part because librarians have not incorporated information behavior (how people need, seek, give and use information in different contexts) into their planning tools. By and large they have failed to determine how people find everyday information and, equally important in such a rapidly changing information environment, how they would prefer to find information. The third problem that has eluded librarians is how people use information, for it is use that results in benefits. Solving these problems will provide librarians with the knowledge and approaches they can use to effectively evaluate library services from the user's perspective and determine the elusive personal, economic, social and cultural contributions to a community.”

● -Grant Abstract

National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP)



- An initiative of the Urban Institute to “*democratize information*”
- As stated on www.urban.org/nnip: “The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a collaborative effort by the Urban Institute and local partners to further the development and use of neighborhood-level information systems in local policymaking and community building.”

NNIP, cont'd.



- Active partnerships in approximately 20 cities that work towards 4 objectives:
 - Advancing the Use of Information in Community Capacity Building
 - Using Information to Enhance Local Policymaking
 - Building the National Neighborhood Data System (NNDS) and Analyzing Neighborhood Change
 - Dissemination, Helping Other Cities Build Neighborhood Indicators Capacity, and Support for Networking

Hartford Public Library is the first public library NNIP partner in the United States.



Hartford Public Library

- Mission: “to promote and support literacy and learning; to provide free and open access to information and ideas and to help people participate in our democratic society”
- An impressive tradition of community outreach, serving one of the poorest cities in the country
- 2002 recipient of the National Award for Library Service from IMLS
- Founding member of the local NNIP initiative, “Hartford Info”



www.hartfordinfo.org

- Initially funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Mission: “developing and using neighborhood-level information in local policy-making and community building, monitoring indicators of social change and progress over time, and democratizing information”
- Activities include:
 - Build a data warehouse for local policymakers
 - Promote the use of information among residents, neighborhood organizations, government entities, non-profit organizations, local business and philanthropic organizations and more
 - Upgrade the Community Information Database and the library’s technology services

Launched in late 2003, www.hartfordinfo.org now averages 4000 hits/month.



We went to Hartford to...

- Understand the information behavior of Hartford community groups/actors

- Specifically:

Information Needs

- What are people trying to accomplish
- What problem(s) are they seeking to resolve
- What are individuals/groups trying to determine/learn
- What (kinds of) content is being sought
- What are the triggers that motivate people to seek community information

Hartford Community Information Behavior, cont'd.

Information Barriers

- How do people know where to go to find the information they need
- What obstacles (physical, cultural, economic, social, etc.) stand in their way of finding/learning what they need to know
- In what ways does the library connect/not connect people with the content they are seeking? How do other sources connect/not connect them with the content they are seeking
- How would individuals/groups prefer to find community/neighborhood information? What kinds of sources would they prefer to have/use
- Are individuals/groups aware of new sources that they think would help

Hartford Community Information Behavior, cont'd.



Information Uses

- How do people use community information in response to their need(s)
- What does community information enable them to do
- Why/how do they use the library or other sources

Hartford Community Information Behavior, cont'd.



Information Benefits

- What benefits do people expect to gain from finding information in response to their need(s)? What is their ultimate goal
- What have they gained through the information seeking process
- How does access to community information improve quality of life for themselves and their community?
- Do they feel that they are a members of an information community



Methodology Challenges

- Understanding the community layers
- How do we know we're talking to the right organizations?
- Understanding organizational connections, affiliations, motivation
- Needed to understand the community
 - Start with our contact
 - Newspaper and Web scan
- Established a two-tier data collection approach
 1. Preliminary interviews
 2. On site follow-up interviews, focus groups, observation



Preliminary Interviews

- Mostly “Informants”
 - HI Partners
 - “Meta-organizations” that work with a lot of others
 - Library staff, including neighborhood team leaders
- A couple of “test” interviews with grassroots organizations
- Objectives
 - Pilot and refine instrument
 - Get an overview of issues, organizations, relationships
 - Identify grassroots organizations to talk to

Onsite Activities



- Focus groups where we could
 - Neighborhood team leaders (library staff)
 - Mini-group with other key staff
- Primarily interviews
 - Still not enough understanding to combine people in groups
- Onsite objectives
 - Delve into information use, needs, barriers
 - Flesh out civic problems and issues being addressed
 - Understand role of library, neighborhood team leaders



Onsite Activities, continued

- Interviews:
 - In-depth follow-up with “meta-orgs” as info users and producers
 - Geographically-based neighborhood action groups
 - Advocacy-oriented interest groups
 - More informants (the value of casual conversations!)
- Observation (intentional)
 - Community groups: strategic planning and monthly membership meeting
 - Library-hosted “Community Conversations”
- Giving something back
 - Outcomes-evaluation presentation by Prof.



More and more research questions