The Community Information Inventory:

Dope that Users Can't Find

by Kathryn Scarich and Margo Trumpeter

Libraries have long served as repositories for local history; rarely, however, have they placed any emphasis on collecting current (often ephemeral) materials generated in their locale. In most cities, service to minority group members has only recently become a library goal. We have increased and improved our programs; we have created black and Chicano literature sections; but do we collect material (literary, political, or social) created by or for that local minority group? In most cases, no. Minority groups which are now asserting more control over their environment have a right of access to the material about themselves.

Information plays a vital role in bringing about social change in a community. In any community, social planners need to know about previous decisions in the community, public sentiment, and similar experiences of other communities. Up until a few years ago, most social planning was generated solely by governmental agencies who had data files and access to files of other governmental agencies. Now as social change has become the goal of community based agencies, these agencies are finding that there is a gap between needed and available information.

Getting to Work: Initial Problems

It was with this in mind that in the spring of 1970 we began gathering material and compiling a bibliography concerning the black community of Champaign-Urbana.* The amount of

* This work was undertaken by the Library Research Center and much of the work was completed on Center time. The 37-page bibliography entitled *The Black Community and Champaign-Urbana, Community Information Inventory, A Subject List,* came out in December, with over 300 copies going to community agencies, libraries, and interested citizens. Sample pages will be available on request from the Library Research Center, University of Illinois, 428 Library, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

work involved was incredible but more astounding was the amount of material available or printed (but scattered) and its potential importance in current and future community planning. However, of more importance to a librarian were the barriers encountered in our search. These barriers point out deficiencies in community communication patterns as well as library acquisition policies. This community information inventory provides a model—a new look at the ways libraries can serve their potential users.

Until the spring of 1970, the black community of Champaign-Urbana, which had been widely studied by a huge assortment of agencies, had infrequently seen the research results. However, the public rarely has easy access to the totality of material about a community; for example, minutes, proceedings, and correspondence of community agencies; research reports, program proposals, and planning details.

Of all the documents we located, approximately fifty percent were in libraries, collected, most of them, by one farsighted librarian who has been collecting local material over the past four years. The rest of the material was stashed away on shelves, in cellars, and in filing cabinets of assorted university and community agencies, each having gathered data to fulfill its own needs.

One important source of information was defunct agencies which we contacted through those involved in their leadership. For example, from the local poverty program which did not receive funds to continue, we located minutes, audits, program proposals, and correspondence. This material would have remained in the warehouse, inaccessible and unknown if we had not made connections. Indeed, innumerable studies representing many years of research and concern with the black community have rotted in warehouses, been burned, or otherwise disposed of.

Our primary sources were currently operating institutions—community service agencies, and local, State, and national governmental bureaus,

as well as members of the university faculty, their students, and the administrative staff.

It-Must-Be-There-Because-It's-Supposed-To-Be-There

On campus, the phenomenon of "research for research's sake" makes visibility and availability of research results a serious information problem. Whether the study is simply a five-page story done by a journalism student or a master's thesis on a sociological aspect of the community, the results of the research are kept long enough to be reviewed by a professor then returned to the student who will probably discard it; or, in the case of a thesis, it is sent to the library and cataloged, most likely without subject or geographical area access. This in most cases creates an information dead end. In one instance, we discovered that research reports completed by candidates for masters' degrees in one of the university's colleges were retained by the college; they were not deposited in the university library. Hoping to obtain several of the reports, we visited the school to learn that nine of the twenty research reports on Champaign-Urbana were missing. The staff offered no explanation, just saying, "All research reports are supposed to be in the files." This gap could only be overcome by contacting the author of the paper, assuming that he could be located.

There are a number of university research agencies which carry on research locally or which act as control agencies for research done in the State. A case in point is the bureau which approves all studies done in the Illinois public school systems. We found that they require neither a final report nor deposit of the report in the university library. As a consequence, of the fifteen approved reports carried on from 1966–70 which concern the black community of Champaign-Urbana, only one is available in the university library. Availability again requires contact with the author, for the institution in this case was an information barrier.

More Cul de Sacs

Studies of the black community are also carried on to complete requirements of prospective funding agencies for research proposals. The results are sent to the requesting agency, but all too frequently their dissemination stops at that point. One example is the grant proposal for a community health center which includes unique and potentially valuable data about actual community health conditions. These data have not been widely disseminated and are available only in the appendix of the proposal. Another outstanding example is a census of black families in Champaign-Urbana which was carried out in 1968 by the University of Illinois to obtain information on the education and employment status of the black community in order to forecast available manpower. This census has only recently been made available to the community and then only after its existence had become common knowledge. Again, access to research results is gained only by those who already know of their existence and are sophisticated in retrieving the information.

Local agencies which study problems in the community in order to better plan for changes or improvements in its social climate or physical nature are another source of information. There are numerous Champaign-Urbana agencies whose goals are to provide services in such forms as head-start programs, advocacy planning programs, adult education and black cultural experiences. Many university-community committees are concerned with the effects of university programs upon the community in such areas as employment, equal opportunity, and housing. The results of these agency and committee meetings are often summarized in the

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Examples of the Type of Information Unearthed

Black Action Council for United Progress, Champaign-Urbana. *Memo to the Public* from Reverend James Offutt, Mr. Paul Hursey, and Mr. David C. Koch; Subject: Black Action Council for United Progress Project for Champaign-Urbana, Ill. March 1969.

Katz, Boris, Charles McCaffery, and Thomas McVeigh. *Social Services of Champaign County.* 1969. (Student paper).

Mitchell, Sandra Tilly, and Sandra J. O'Meara. *Agency Usage by Residents of High and Low-Income Residential Areas in Champaign-Urbana.* 1969.

Black Coalition. Champaign-Urbana, Ill. Summer project to be implemented June 1, 1970 (for education, recreation, performing activities for the whole community).

Editor and Publisher Market Guide. New York, Editor and Publisher Co., Inc., 1970.

Badger, Earladeen D. (Project Advisor, Parent and Child Center, Institute for Research on Exceptional Children). *Mothers' Training Program: A New Identity for the Poor.* June 1970.

Lindsay, Ronald C., and Rita C. Mannebach. *The Self Concepts of Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Pupils as Related to the Racial Balancing of the Champaign Community Unit School District Number 4, 1969.* (Research report).

Ransom, James. Talk presented to Deans and Directors and Heads of Departments on the Affirmative Action Program at the University of Illinois including black employment statistics. December 18, 1970.

League of Women Voters of Champaign County. *The Relationship of Segregation and Financing Practices to Minority Housing Problems in Champaign-Urbana, 1961.* (revised, 1963).

Citizens for Racial Justice. University Employment Committee. *Report on Non-Academic Employment at the University of Illinois, Urbana Campus, 1968.* February, 1969.

Lambert, M., C. Harwood, and R. Nanette. *Education and Manpower; The Condition of the Black Community in Champaign-Urbana.* 1969. (Student paper).

Shulenburger, David Edwin. *Patterns of Negro Non-Academic Employment at the University of Illinois; Their Consequences for Affirmative Action.* Urbana, 1968. (Thesis).

Black Coalition. Letter to Champaign-Urbana Public Health District concerning Health Services in Champaign Co., April 14, 1970.

United Community Council of Champaign County. *Champaign County Directory of Health, Welfare and Recreation Resources.* 1968.

Kronus, Sidney J., and Regan G. Smith. *The Small Claims Court Discrimination against the Poor.* (survey taken at the Champaign County Small Claims Court). Summer, 1968.

Pawloski, George. *Rent Withholding and Its Possible Consequences in Champaign County.* (for Legal Services Agency). 1968.

Illinois. *University Hearing Panel on Black-White Relationships.* Report. October 1970.

Champaign County, Illinois. Housing Authority. *Memo from E. Finney on Garbage Removal for Public Housing Projects.* May 1, 1969.

newspapers, but any hard data and detailed survey recommendations are usually retained by the agency concerned. Each community agency has its own files of newsletters, reports, research survey findings, proposals, etc. which have potential value to other agencies but which are rarely exchanged. In many instances we pointed out this potential usefulness and their files were opened. However, there were many times when access to files was more difficult. For example, there have been a number of Grand Jury investigations of the County Jail. These findings have been summarized by the newspapers, but access to the original complete document (although public) is nearly impossible. We were unable to obtain these Grand Jury reports even after providing the county clerk with exact title and date. A copy was finally given to us by a member of the Grand Jury. This is another situation in which the larger community is denied the opportunity to evaluate the original data.

Some of the most visible and easily available studies are those which are done specifically for community information—most of which are by community service agencies. The Urbana Human Relations Commission, for example, studies

specific issues concerning the black community and makes appropriate recommendations to the City Council and the public. In 1969, when the use of police dogs against civil rights demonstrators had become a national issue, an Urbana police dog attacked a black citizen. The Urbana City Council asked the Commission to investigate the incident. The final report, which included the background and scope of the investigation, the chronology of events, and the Commission's conclusions and recommendations, was summarized in the newspaper, and copies were given to the City Council members and made readily available to the public through the Commission's Office.

Sniffing-Out Tactics

Knowing the types of material available but not accessible, we developed a search strategy. Locating such material required personal interviews: going from student to student, from agency to agency, from library to library. First, libraries in the area were contacted for unique material in their collections. In Champaign-Urbana there are two public libraries, a community college library, public school libraries, three newspaper morgues, and the university library. Their card catalogs were our first barriers.

Not all materials concerning Champaign or Urbana were listed under the subject headings "Champaign, Illinois" or "Urbana, Illinois." We found geographic subdivisions under more than fifty pertinent subject headings, e.g., "Poverty," "Urban Renewal," "Cities and Towns—Planning." There were no *see also* references. We have no way of verifying whether or not we checked all appropriate subjects. Thus, the card catalog does not act as a maximally efficient tool in bringing together all material on a certain geographic location (even the community where the library is located).

Librarians proved a very valuable resource. Because of their knowledge of ongoing research in the university and the community, they directed us to many people and sources we would never have found in the card catalog or in a book.

Our next step was to contact all agencies— university, community, and governmental—concerned with social change in the twin-cities. There were *no* complete and current lists of such agencies available, so we developed our own, using traditional print sources such as telephone directories, local newspapers, and lists developed by the League of Women Voters, the United Community Council, local churches, and the park districts. However, our personal contacts with members of both the university and black communities were our most valuable sources of information.

An incredible amount of information is available in your community, but you will be challenged to use your imagination time and again to surmount the various barriers to public information. People inside and very often outside the formal institutions are invaluable keys to current information. Print becomes a secondary source. From reading the bibliographies, footnotes and acknowledgements as well as the substance of the articles you acquire, you will find more leads and a wealth of information.

We librarians pride ourselves for being in control of information of all kinds: to know what is available, where to get it, how to store it, and to whom to disseminate it. The current trend of information control (as used by credit unions as well as the military) seems to be that of concealing information about individuals from them and making it available, instead, to more powerful individuals. It is incumbent upon librarians in these days of simultaneous information glut and gap to make the right material available to the right people. We must begin to use our command of information in more human ways. Most minority groups do not have the same ease of access to facts about themselves that is enjoyed by larger groups, such as the local government, local service agencies, the local university, the local police department. Instead of having the police department expect us to supply them with circulation data, we should expect to supply the people with information of social significance about themselves.

An amazing amount of information is available in all communities. Where it is not accessible or in a usable format, it is up to us to collect it, package it and then insure the people their right of access. ▣