# Section 8: Making links and promoting the resource centre

The resource centre needs to ensure that it continues to meet users' needs, by involving users in developing the collection and services, promoting its services to users, and keeping in touch with organisations working in similar fields to share information and ideas. This section includes:

8.1     Involving users
8.2     Promoting the resource centre
8.3     Networks and networking

Related sections are:
1.1     Assessing information needs
2.2     Strategic planning
3.3     Advisory committees
3.2     Planning the layout
6.9.4   Electronic conferences
7       Information services

# 8.1 Involving users

Involving the people who use the resource centre in developing the collection and services is an important way to ensure that the resource centre continues to meet users' needs. It also helps to attract funding, because it shows that the resource centre is responding to a demonstrated need.

Encouraging users or staff from the organisation to become members of a resource centre advisory committee (see Section 2.2: Advisory committees) is a good way to involve these people. However, it is also important to encourage them to understand what part the resource centre plays in their own work, how it can help, and how their involvement in the resource centre can enhance both their own work and that of the resource centre. It can be useful to arrange meetings with groups of staff to talk about the how the resource centre can assist them. For example, the resource centre can help them to update their knowledge and support their personal development, or help them to complete a training programme or distance education course. If possible, these meetings should be held in the resource centre.

It is useful to spend some time during the strategic planning process (see Section 1.2: Strategic planning) listing different types of users and others interested in the resource centre, and then grouping those with similar interests together, and considering how to involve the different groups.

For example, groups of users may include:
• health workers
• allied health workers
• rehabilitation workers
• community workers
• members of the local community
• educators and trainers
• students
• members of health committees and health teams
• programme/project staff
• government staff
• people from related sectors such as education and environment.

## 8.1.1 Involving key people

Within each group, it is worth identifying key people to promote the resource centre as information 'gatekeepers'. It is also important to involve trainers and people linked with communities based away from the resource centre.

**Information gatekeepers**  It is useful to identify individuals within each group who have a particular interest in information, and encourage them to become champion resource centre users, or information 'gatekeepers' for their group (such as nurses, students or members of health teams). They should be

encouraged to identify and share information with their group, encourage other members of the group to use the resource centre, and help them to use the materials. They should also gather information relevant to any team or committee meetings that they participate in, to encourage the use of information in decision-making.

Information gatekeepers also have the role of keeping the resource centre staff up-to-date on information needs and topics of interest, and highlighting which materials have been particularly useful for which types of activities, meetings or user groups.

As well as having information gatekeepers, it is useful to set up 'journals clubs'. Each member of staff keeps up-to-date with the contents of specific journals, and shares this information with their colleagues.

**Trainers**  It is important to involve those responsible for training activities or continuing education. Training methods that involve the use of resource centre materials are increasingly being used for both initial training and continuing education. These include, for example, problem-based learning (where participants solve a problem or answer a question by seeking out information and discussing it), and individual course members taking it in turns to make presentations to colleagues.

Time could be allocated within official working hours for staff to visit the resource centre, as part of staff development or in-service training programmes. For example, they could visit the resource centre on a rota system, if other duties permit.

Close working relationships between resource centre staff and trainers and managers should be encouraged, to promote the use of the resource centre as a learning strategy. Managers should encourage staff to seek solutions to problems by looking for information in the resource centre. They should promote the resource centre as a source of information to help staff carry out practical tasks and answer queries arising from ward round or health visits.

Staff who are responsible for arranging training workshops can encourage participants to continue learning afterwards, by displaying examples of relevant materials during the workshop, and encouraging participants to visit the resource centre to find more materials.

**People in the community**  People who work in the community, outreach workers, or those who work for organisations based some way from the resource centre, should be encouraged to use the resource centre, and pass on information to the people they work with. It is important to ask them about the information needs of the groups that they are working with.

## 8.1.2 Ideas for involving individual users

Individual users can be involved in a number of ways, such as:

- asking them to give new users an introductory talk or reference interview (see Section 7.4: Advisory services), and encouraging them to ask questions
- asking users to help identify gaps in the collection and suggest materials to add
- inviting users to take part in planning meetings
- asking users to distribute an annual report or regular newsletter – this is particularly relevant to those who work in the community or are members of teams or committees, as it helps to publicise the resource centre more widely
- encouraging users to write down their comments on the services provided and suggestions for how to improve them, and putting these in a 'suggestions box' in the resource centre.

Giving introductory talks or reference interviews is especially useful for people who are running training courses, as they can then encourage participants to use the materials as part of their training, and they themselves will develop a good knowledge of what is available on the subject area. Carrying out reference interviews with new students or staff also helps trainers to know more about the current knowledge and information and training needs of the user.

# 8.2 Promoting the resource centre

The people that the resource centre aims to serve will not automatically come to it. The resource centre needs to be publicised and people need to be encouraged to use it. Users need to be made aware of all the services available, not just some. For example, some people may know that there is a lending service, but not know that there is also a photocopying service.

Services may need to be improved before they are promoted. There is no point in encouraging people to use the resource centre if it has very few materials, or if staff are unavailable to assist users. It is important to be sure that the services can be delivered before starting to promote them.

## 8.2.1 How to plan a promotion

To promote the resource centre:

1. List groups of users and identify those to whom you need to promote the resource centre. For example, your resource centre may aim to serve the local community, but very few women come, so you need to promote it to women.

2. Try to find out why certain groups of people are not using the resource centre. Then decide what type of promotional activity would be best for each group (see below), and what promotional materials you will need to support this activity.

3. Draw up a budget and detailed plan, including a plan of how you will evaluate the promotional activity. Produce any materials to support the promotional activity, such as leaflets, posters or signs. Organise the activity.

4. Evaluate the activity (review how effective it has been) and use the results of the evaluation to help you prepare future promotional activities.

## 8.2.3 Promotional activities

There are many ways to promote a resource centre, such as providing a good service, signposting and advertising, organising activities, producing and distributing materials, and networking.

**Providing a good service**
- Maintain an up-to-date and well-ordered collection.
- Provide a good service to users and encourage users to let other people know about the resource centre.
- Carry out regular needs assessment (see Section 1.1) and respond to the findings.

**Signposting and advertising**

- Make sure that the resource centre is clearly signposted from all relevant parts of the organisation, such as the reception area, training and meeting rooms, or dining hall.
- If there are any narrow corridors or steps, signpost alternative ways of reaching the resource centre that avoid these barriers.
- Clearly label shelves and collection areas to make the resource centre easier to use. For larger resource centres, it can also help to display a floor plan.
- Place noticeboards in other parts of the organisation, such as the reception area, or outside meeting or training rooms. Use them to display resource centre opening times and information about topical issues.
- Display posters to advertise the resource centre in places where users will see them, or distribute posters to other organisations to display.
- Include a short section on the resource centre in orientation guides for new students or employees.
- Arrange for articles about the resource centre to be included in local newspapers or specialist publications, or for an interview to be broadcast on radio or television.



**Arranging activities**

- Arrange for all new staff members to visit the resource centre as part of their induction programme, and include a leaflet on the resource centre as part of any induction pack that is provided to them.
- Arrange with training institutions to include a visit to the resource centre as part of their training courses, and encourage institutions to promote the use of resource centres as a learning strategy.

- Encourage meetings to be held in the resource centre, either by staff of the organisation that the resource centre is part of, or other organisations (at times when they will not disturb users).
- Hold open days and exhibitions in the resource centre.
- Give a brief talk about the resource centre at public gatherings or meetings of health management teams or village health committees.

**Producing and distributing materials**
- Distribute acquisitions lists (lists of materials newly added to the resource centre collection – see Section 7.9).
- Distribute leaflets containing brief details of services offered, opening times, charges and who to contact for further information. Display them in the resource centre itself and other places where users are likely to see them, such as training institutions or at conferences, or include them in response to written enquiries. Ask community health and outreach workers to distribute them when visiting other organisations, or meeting with members of the resource centre's target groups.
- Distribute a newsletter to keep people across a wide area in touch with the resource centre's activities, if you can afford to produce it.
- Distribute an annual report of the resource centre or organisation that the resource centre is part of, describing the resource centre's activities and highlighting key developments and plans.

**Networking**
- Develop links with other resource centres (see Section 8.3: Networks and networking).

# 8.3  Networks and networking

Networking means keeping in contact with individuals or organisations working in a similar field, to exchange ideas and experiences, and provide mutual support.

Networking is an important way for organisations and individuals to keep informed, and is therefore important for resource centre staff. Networking can help resource centre staff to solve problems, exchange professional advice, and experience, and even carry out joint activities, such as producing publications, assessing or translating materials, holding training workshops and arranging exchange visits.

Networks of resource centre and information staff are particularly useful for:
* sharing information about new resources
* responding to questions
* providing document supply services
* sharing catalogue/database records
* sharing experiences in managing the resource centre and its services
* collaborating on producing or adapting materials
* providing training
* developing funding proposals
* advocating for the importance of access to information.

## 8.3.1 Developing a network

Networking can be an informal activity, such as keeping in regular contact with other resource centre staff, passing on information about new resources, or asking for information on specific topics. Regular networking can lead to the development of a recognised network, with membership and a set of objectives.

Networks can develop informally, or they can be established as a formal group with an administrator. They may be local, national or international. The geographic divide is gradually being reduced by increasing access to electronic networks (see Section 6.9.4 Electronic conferences). Networks can be made up of organisations and individuals within a particular sector, or from a number of different sectors, and can aid intersectoral collaboration. Members of a community health network may include NGOs, aid agencies, government health departments, academic institutions, research centres, training centres, issue-based movements and journalists.

Exchanging information is one of the most useful activities of networks. Some networks are set up primarily to help link and inform information workers (such as AHILA-Net and the Health Information Forum). Some networks are formed for the sole purpose of exchanging information on specific health issues, such as drug policy, community health or participatory research. Networks are also important in bringing together enough voices to advocate

for resource centres and the use of information, and to attract funding for development work.

Networks can be temporary – set up to exchange information about a particular topic for a specific period of time, or to campaign for a change in policy – or more permanent – dedicated to a long-term, comprehensive programme, such as a commitment to train and support information workers.

It is useful even for informal networks to have some form of objectives, as these determine their activities and the types of individuals and organisations likely to be active members. It is also useful to stand back occasionally and evaluate how well the network is achieving its objectives, and whether they need to be re-emphasised, or re-defined. It is useful to periodically analyse not just the actual activities and discussions, but also their usefulness and impact on the network members and their work. If there is no network administrator, one of the members could be identified to coordinate this analysis.

## 8.3.2 Successful networking

Factors that contribute to effective networking include:
- solidarity among all members of the network, including understanding the different levels of resources (time and financial) which each member or organisation is able to contribute
- mutual trust among members
- clearly defined objectives
- a committed core of active members, who are representative of the members
- clearly defined coordination roles and responsibilities (where appropriate)
- a willingness to delegate responsibilities to involve a variety of the membership
- spontaneity (the network has developed naturally)
- openness
- flexibility and awareness of the need to change or discontinue the network once the immediate goals have been achieved
- equal involvement at all levels.

---

**TIP: Gaining from a network**
If you participate in a network, it is useful to consider what you and your resource centre have gained from being part of the network. If you have not gained, it could be because you have not fully participated, or because it is not an appropriate network for your resource centre.

---