

Affinity Centres - A Tool for Reaching Diverse Communities: The San Francisco Model

By Martín Gómez

The new Main Library of the San Francisco Public Library Public Library was officially opened in 1996. This beautiful beaux-arts style building, designed by I.M. Pei, was constructed at a cost of over \$120 million (U.S). The Library Foundation, a separate non-governmental organization, raised an additional \$32 million (U.S.) from private donors to furnish and equip this "state of the art" facility. The private fundraising effort was called: The Main Campaign.

A major success factor in the private fundraising effort for the Main Campaign was the creation and marketing of "affinity centres" as a tool for attracting donor contributions. Affinity centres were proposed as dedicated spaces in the building program that would house collections and sponsor programs designed to meet the library needs of various underserved segments of the community. This strategy proved successful, not only because of the financial contributions that were received, but additionally because of the high level of engagement and participation by various underserved segments of the community in the Main Campaign and ultimately in the future of the new library, its programs and collections.

By the conclusion of the Main Campaign, affinity group participation resulted in the creation of dedicated spaces in the library: African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Chinese, Filipino-American, Gay & Lesbian and environmental communities.

This presentation will focus on the:

- Specific techniques used to establish the affinity centres;
- Strategies employed to recruit key leaders from the community to participate in their creation;
- Challenges of keeping the community and library actively engaged in the future development of the centres;
- An overview of the collections and programs hosted by each centre.