Information Technology Use Behaviors of Community-Engaged Rural Librarians: A Future beyond the Theory-Practice Discourse to Integrate Impact

Bharat Mehra, Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee
Email: bmehra@utk.edu.

Everette Scott Sikes, Doctoral Student, School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee.

Vandana Singh, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee.

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Assessment of Rural Library Professionals' Role in Community Engagement in the Southern and Central Appalachian Region: Mobilization from Change Agents to Community Anchors (CA2CA@SCA-RL)

Institute of Museum and Library Services,
Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian – FY 2017 Guidelines (Community Anchors Project Category: Planning Grant), July 2017 – June 2019 (PI: B. Mehra. Co-PI: V. Singh). http://scholar.cci.utk.edu/ca2ca-sca-rl/
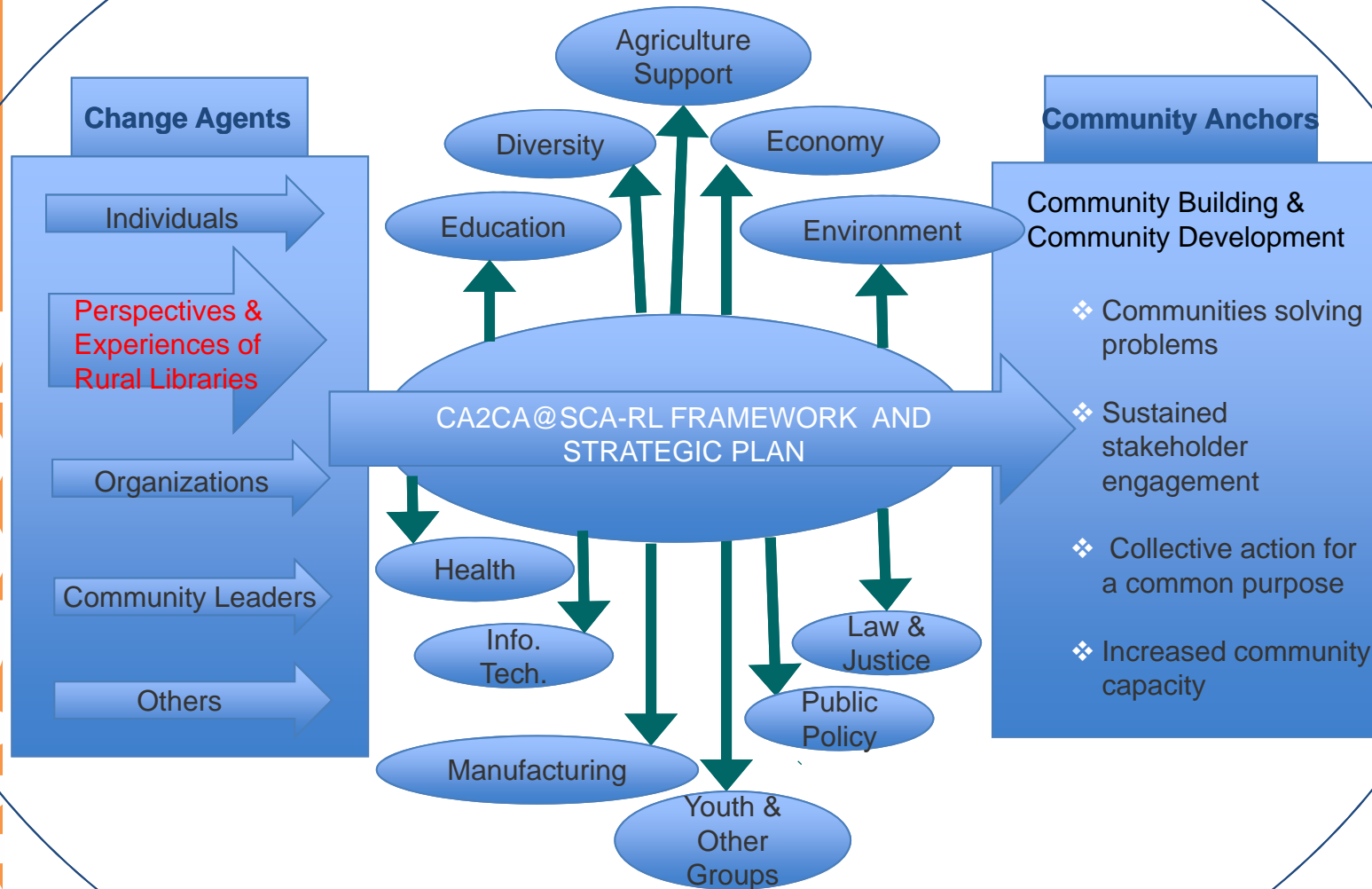
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Definitions

❖ U. S. Census Bureau defines (2010) "rural" as areas with fewer than 2,500 people and open territory (Economic Research Service, 2007): anything that is not an Urban Area (which is defined as having a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks with an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile).

❖ *The Encyclopedia of Rural America's* related concept of "nonmetropolitan" counties include the spread of housing developments outside the boundaries of metro areas that have no cities with as many as 50,000 residents (Rathge, 1997), in addition to being non-urbanized (OMB, 1998).

❖ The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), created as a Unites States federal-state partnership, demarcates Appalachia to include 420 counties in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The ARC (1974) identifies *Central Appalachia* to include: West Virginia's nine southernmost counties, eastern Kentucky, Virginia's southwestern tip, and the northwestern portion of Tennessee's Appalachian area (Bush, 2003), while *southern Appalachia* includes: most of Appalachian Virginia and Tennessee as well as the western Carolinas and the northern parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

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Change Agents

Individuals

Perspectives & Experiences of Rural Libraries

Organizations

Community Leaders

Others

Agriculture Support

Diversity

Economy

Education

Environment

CA2CA@SCA-RL FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIC PLAN

Health

Info. Tech.

Law & Justice

Public Policy

Manufacturing

Youth & Other Groups

Community Anchors

Community Building & Community Development

❖ Communities solving problems

❖ Sustained stakeholder engagement

❖ Collective action for a common purpose

❖ Increased community capacity

A Domain-Based Model of Community Engagement in Rural Libraries

[conceptual]

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Research Methods

❖ The paper is based on qualitative content analysis of feedback from 15 rural librarians in semi-structured interviews and five focus groups (with three respondents each) conducted during 2017-2018.

❖ Representative scenarios or typical experience-related narratives of IT use and IT-related behaviors of rural librarians provide a glimpse of their technology-based, community-engaged initiatives (Carroll, 2003, 1995; Mehra, Bishop, Bazzell, and Smith, 2002).

❖ Respondents' perspectives, behaviors, and vocabularies surrounding their experiences of IT use behaviors in community-engaged activities are selectively highlighted in terms: "aboutness" of projects, collaborating partners, encountered challenges specific to their regions in implementing technology-related programs and services, and resulting outcomes.

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Information Technology "Aboutness"
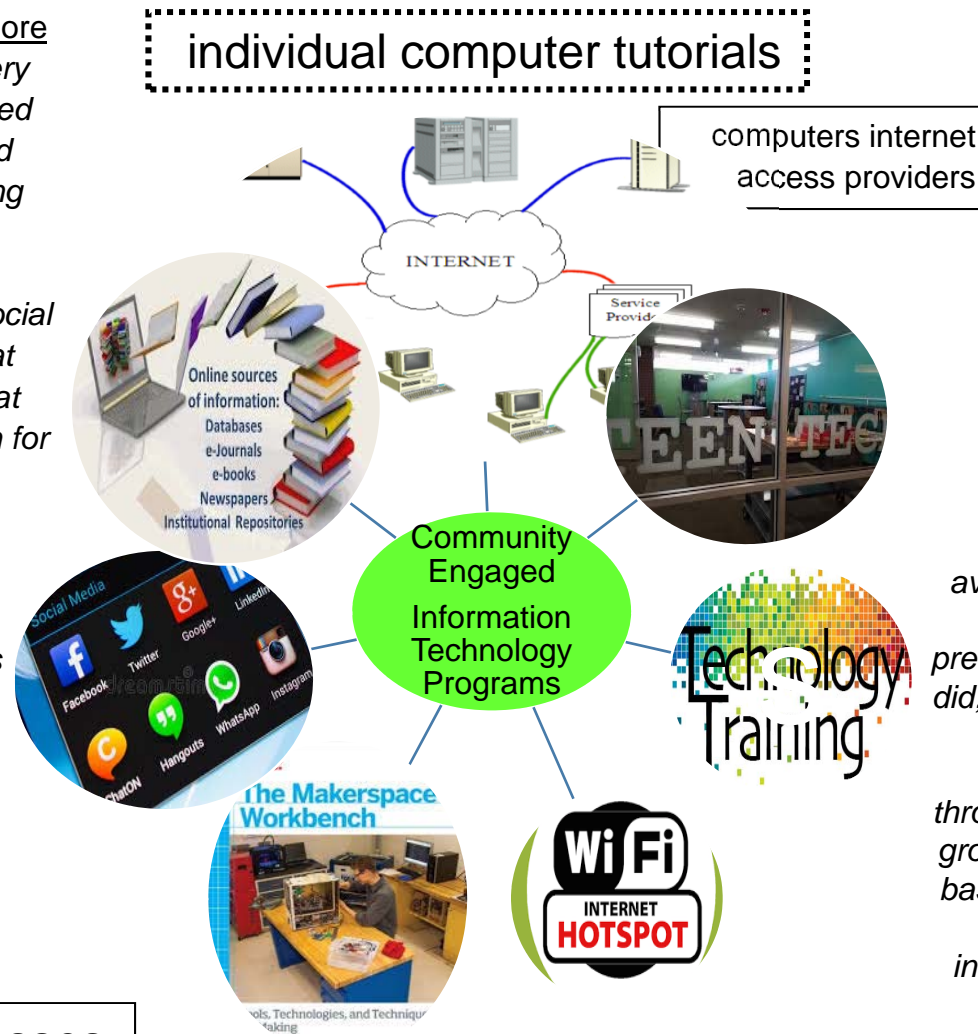
<u>Access to Computers/Internet and More</u>
"One of the key aspects of the delivery of their work[in rural libraries] is related to providing access to computers and internet plus, of course, all the training elements that go into it…providing hotspots, new types of gadgets and media that they can integrate plus social media, so that's why I brought up that matter. Because that's a key area that they are going to continue working in for rural patrons that might not these resources."

individual computer tutorials

computers internet access providers

INTERNET

Service Provider

Online sources of information:
Databases
e-Journals
e-books
Newspapers
Institutional Repositories

Community Engaged Information Technology Programs

TEEN TECH

Technology Training

<u>Remote Access to Authoritative Online Resources</u>
"Well, we always make available anytime we do the programs, like the food preservation programs that we did, we always make available online services that are available or information through UT Extension or other groups that provide research-based information, you know, very reliable sources of information to people in far-flung areas."

<u>Social Media Connections</u>
"So, and we try to connect…besides our website, but through Facebook and social media with our clientele in all the programs that we deliver, so important for our patrons to keep up with new applications that might not be possible in their homes."

Social Media

The Makerspace Workbench

Tools, Technologies, and Techniques Making

Wi Fi INTERNET HOTSPOT

computer/technology classes

"Mainly our instructors are our external folks…We hope by providing these classes and activities, that we're making our patrons and our students more technology ready for the community that needs them to go to work and have technology education. And then, we hope that they're going to school and are a little more tech savvy when they get there and can talk about the things they've done here at the library with the 3-D printer."

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATORS

SERVICE: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

"Wilkes County, the library there worked with the Wilkes Economic Development Council on a grant, they got some money to do some programming to purchase EverWondr, which is an online calendar, primarily for tourism and a copy/printer/fax machine…it's an EnvisionWare document imaging station… to put in the library for local small business folks who don't have an office or access to that kind of equipment [to] let them come to the library and use it for free."

WELCOME TO WILKES COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

SERVICE: TEEN TECHNOLOGY SPACE

"The library worked with Rotary to get grant for the Glade Spring teen area…pull in Emory & Henry students to help conduct some programs and sessions…twice a month kids just free play with the X-Box. They have a book club there…This past summer, they had a couple come in and do a program on video editing…It's a good way to partner because we don't have the expertise that other entities have…now, trying to plan for the upstairs of that building, be the place where the robotics goes…then serve as a prototype that we could be able to put similar resources in some of the other different locations."

ONLINE ESL CLASSES

SERVICE: E-LIBRARY CARDS

"I'm going around to the middle school and getting all the kids with a library electronic card to where they can check out e-books, audiobooks, and video through us…whatever they check out, it checks itself back in, so the parent's never pay out-of-pocket for a lost book and the teachers have got the kids' reading all the time because they all have laptops."
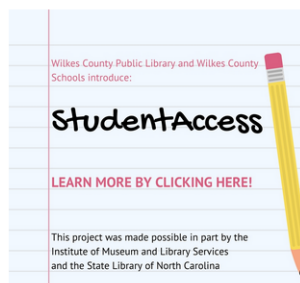
SERVICE: JOB LABS *"The NC Works folks work closely with community colleges and other people who actually can come in [to the library] and provide job counseling and assistance in helping doing resumes or, you know, exploring different jobs, too, which is just wonderful for them because it provides a lot more in-depth counseling than the library staff could, although the library staff does everything they can and do assist with getting onto the online job listings and that kind of thing. But, this provides even more in-depth assistance for people looking for jobs or for people in transition and it's, you know, everything from, you know, working in grocery stores to just whatever jobs are listed, basically whatever they're qualified for."*

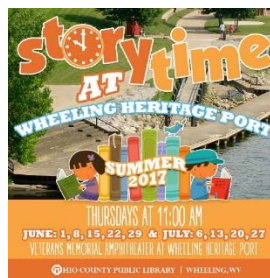## Computer/Internet Access-Connectivity-Limited Resource Issues
"I know we had someone come and talk about having hot spots that could be checked out and, you know, again, we looked into it. Part of the problem is there are lots of pockets where there's just no reception at all so, that's a challenge. But, I think things will keep evolving. I think there's awareness of the need for all these things, but, again, we just look at the resources in terms of funding versus what we can do in relatively smaller libraries in a rural area with pretty tight budgets."

StudentAccess

Wilkes County Public Library and Wilkes County Schools introduce:

StudentAccess

LEARN MORE BY CLICKING HERE!

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the State Library of North Carolina

Discover our newest service for public school students!

Staff's Lack of Awareness of Online Services and Resources
"And, I guess in this past year working with the Lannom Library in Tullahoma that they made me much more aware of the online services that they have that I was not familiar with. I didn't realize they had such a strong online presence that they were providing for the community. So, you know, that was a real learning opportunity for me just as a program partner."

story time AT WHEELING HERITAGE PORT
SUMMER 2017
THURSDAYS AT 11:00 AM
JUNE: 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 & JULY: 6, 13, 20, 27
VETERANS MEMORIAL AMPHITHEATER AT WHEELING HERITAGE PORT
OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY | WHEELING, WV

Blue Ridge Business Development Center

Home
Clients and Partners
Business Development
Community Access
Floor Plan

Welcome to the Blue Ridge BDC

The Blue Ridge Business Development Center is dedicated to the creation of business opportunities and the creation of the advancement of technology jobs and skills for the people of Alleghany County, North Carolina.

Limited Computers and Space in Technology Training Classes
"So, some of the challenges would be, maybe not having enough computers and devices. We have a really high demand for our Mac lab…especially for the student-led classes. They fill up really quickly…people can feel like they're a part of the class and not having to share. But, slowly, we're building our collection of those."

Information Technology: Challenges
Intertwining owing to the impact of limited availability of resources-time-space-staff working under constraining conditions.

SERCICE: WI-FI HOTSPOT PROGRAM

I thought, if people are gone for a week for vacation, they are going to need it for longer than seven days because they might not be back to turn it in and they don't want to accrue the late fee. We don't charge a lot of late fees; just on a few things. Hot spots was one of them they were checked out all the time and they remain checked out. Lot of it's for business travelers that don't want to pay for the Wi-Fi at a hotel or on the cruise ship or whatever…But, we do have several of our patrons who have told us they basically are using us for their home Internet. They have cancelled their Charter or their Comcast or their CenturyLink or whatever it was they had at home and they just come and pay us the monthly fee."

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OUTCOMES

SERVICE: DIGITAL LITERACY

*"We also have a digital literacy curriculum…in response to this real need in our area for digital literacy. We are the place that people come and say, oh, I've got to get my pay stub online now and I don't know what an email address is and all these things, so we are really trying to be that place where people can come to as that first step to increase their comfort level. And, we're talking about people who can't type, who can't use a mouse, so we really tried to develop some basic core literacy, digital literacy type things and we've also tried to do some other things."*

SERVICE: MAKER SPACE/COMPUTER LAB

"We have the computers. We have the 3-D printer. We've got Mac…we've got Apple computers. We've got HP computers. We've got iPads. We've got Kindles. We've got about anything anybody wants to try before they buy."

SERVICE: ALTERNATIVE STORY TIME

"I'm doing Facetime Live with story time, getting those rural kids that are in the special needs spectrum. Because we know that the loud noises really bother some of them and the fluorescent lighting is horrible…and they can watch me do story time on Facebook anytime because I archive it."
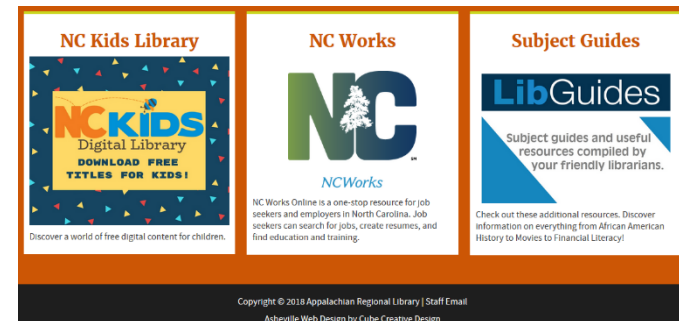
SERVICE: COMPUTER/INTERNET ACCESS

"Now, in Alleghany County, we do have pretty good wireless within the library and outside the library and we're, you know, fine for people to use that outside in their cars, when the library is closed and all the libraries do see, you know, people sitting outside using the wireless, whether it's the police or the Sheriff's Department or individuals are sitting outside, we're really glad to be able to offer that after library hours."

Implications: Future Strategic Directions

- ❖ Scenarios of rural librarians spotlight limitations of past isolated conceptualizations of information behavior research and library services/practices design work that have been treated as separate disconnected areas within the LIS professions.

- ❖ There are very few studies in situational relevance and contextual factors in systems design that have focused on contexts of rural libraries and rural communities (Höglund & Wilson, 2000; Pettigrew, Fidel, &Bruce, 2001; Kruger et al., 2012; Mehra, 2017).

- ❖ Rural librarians' voices as actors/users have been missing in IT-use and user behavior research (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015; Mehra, Bishop, and Partee II, 2018).

- ❖ Methodologically, important to find ways to document community engagement in rural areas that has potential to become an important aspect of work of the LIS researcher, educator, and/or professional, missing in past information behavior and practice research (Mehra, Singh, Hollenbach, and Partee II, 2017).

- ❖ An integration of impact/outcome in the theory-practice discourse will help expand the relevance of the professions moving forward into the future to adequately represent this marginalized population.

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Questions and Comments?

Thank You!

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