

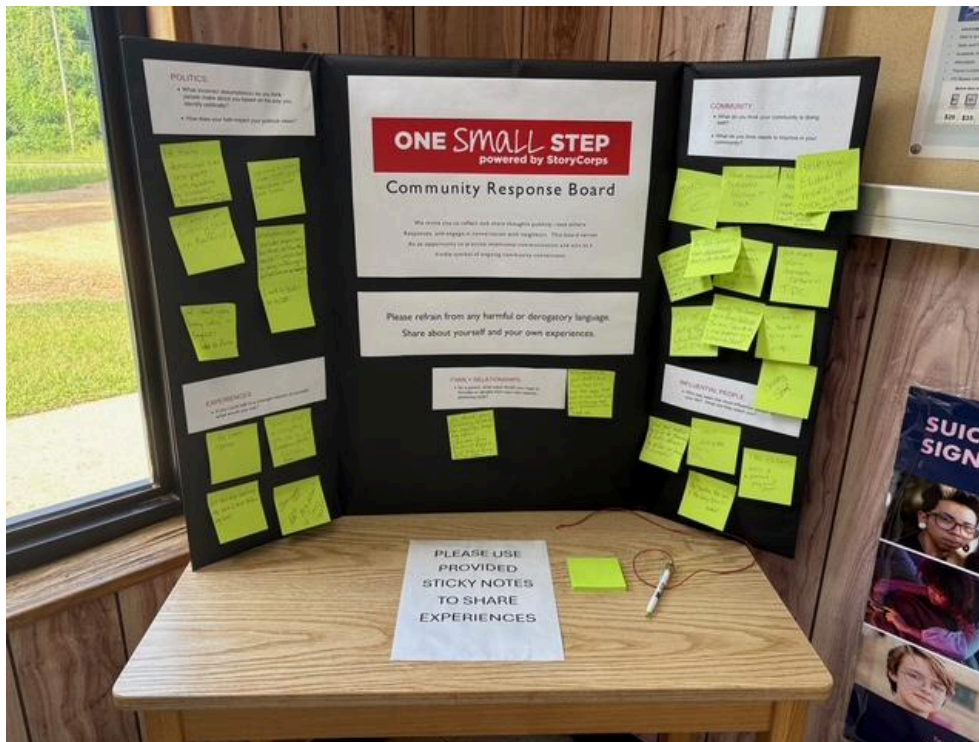
CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY RESPONSE BOARDS AS A FIRST STEP, ONE SMALL STEP IN BASSFIELD



Overview

In Bassfield, Mississippi, Alison Smith wanted to better understand what her community was thinking about and what they felt was missing. As manager at Dr. Frank L. Leggett Public Library, she knew that inviting people into conversation could feel uncertain, especially in a small town where participation is never guaranteed. She worried that no one might respond at all, or that the responses could be negative. Joining the One Small Step Libraries Initiative gave her a way to begin by listening rather than asking people to speak publicly.

Approach

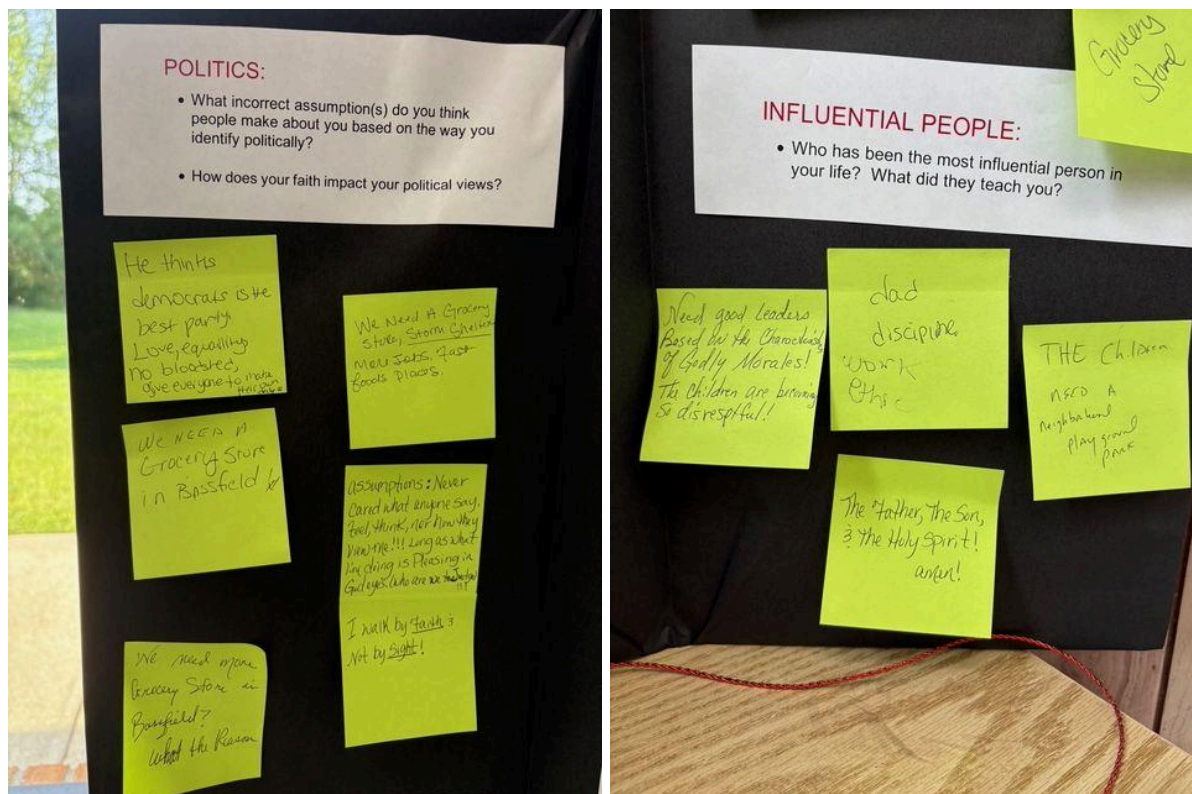


Alison started with a Community Response Board and placed it in three locations: the library, the local post office, and City Hall. Each board invited handwritten responses to a single prompt, such as “If you could talk to a younger version of yourself,

what would you say?” Participation was anonymous, and there was no expectation

that people would engage with one another. The intention was simply to make space for reflection.

The response varied by location. City Hall did not receive any responses. The board at the library received four responses, while the board at the post office gathered about twenty eight. Although the number of responses was modest, clear themes emerged. Multiple comments pointed to the need for a grocery store in Bassfield. Others expressed a desire for more activities for children and families. Seeing these themes repeated helped Alison understand what community members were most eager to talk about.

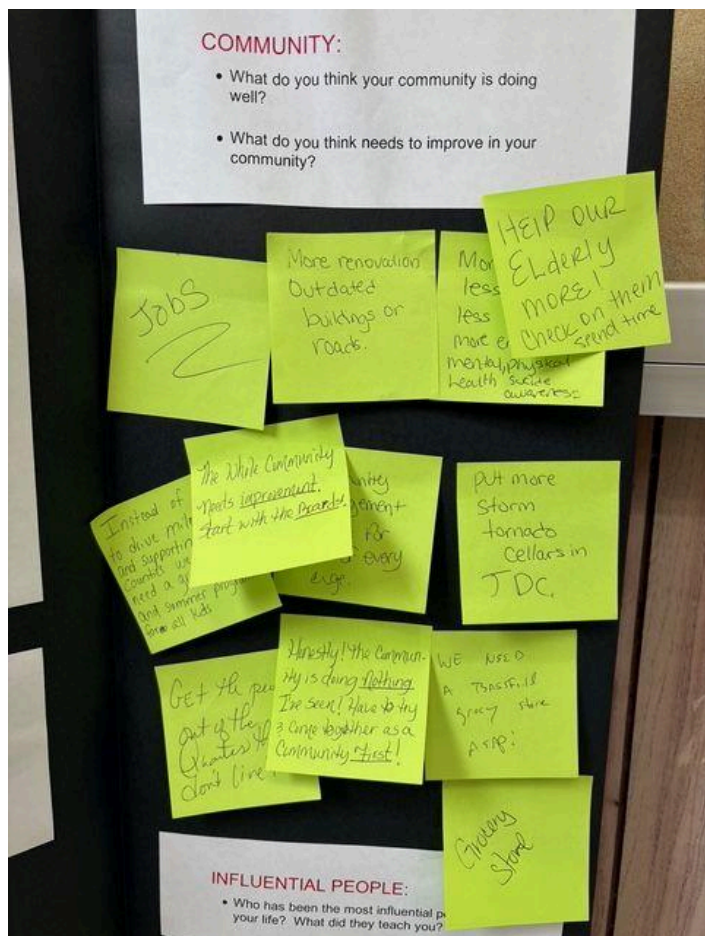


Several responses reflected personal values and belief systems. One note read, “Love yourself no matter what.” Another shared, “The experiences in my life have caused me to be a different and better person.” Alison noticed that many responses were grounded in faith and appreciated that people felt comfortable sharing those perspectives in a public space.

Key Insights & Lessons Learned

The response board became a learning experience for Alison as well as a tool for community feedback. Through One Small Step, she practiced listening with greater intention, focusing on understanding rather than responding. The process of reading and sitting with the responses reinforced that practice and helped her feel more confident offering reflection based programming.

The experience shifted her expectations. She had worried that no one would engage, but the presence of thoughtful responses, including contributions from colleagues and library leadership, affirmed that people were willing to share when given a low-pressure way to do so.

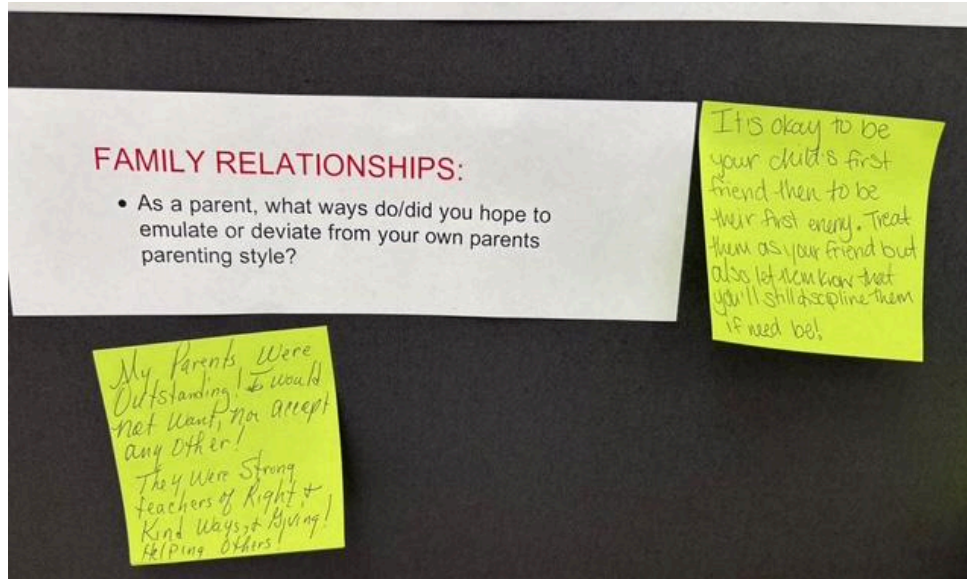


Notable Outcomes

Alison sees the response board as groundwork for future efforts. The feedback around family activities and community needs is already shaping how she thinks about what the library could offer next. She plans to implement another Community Response Board in Bassfield and hopes to expand the approach to another branch.

She is also interested in teen focused programming and sees potential partnerships with local schools. Building relationships beyond the library feels essential for expanding the reach of One Small Step in her community.

Reflecting on the experience, Alison emphasizes the value of starting small and using existing resources rather than trying to design something from scratch. The OSS toolkit helped her take that first step and gave her a foundation to build on.



Key Takeaways and Looking Ahead

Outreach emerged as the primary challenge. Many Bassfield residents do not use social media, and some community members, particularly seniors, do not use technology at all. Alison reflected that future efforts might benefit from a kickoff event or outreach through the local newspaper. She also wished she had rotated the response board questions more frequently, noting that changing them weekly might have encouraged continued engagement.

Despite these challenges, Alison viewed the project as a meaningful first attempt. It helped her think more carefully about how to design programming that meets people where they are and how to gather insight before moving into facilitated conversation.

This case study highlights programs adapted from One Small Step toolkits. Visit diy.takeonesmallstep.org to explore the tools.