

2013 Minnesota Library Legislative Day: A Case Study

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this legislative day in Minnesota was to secure funding for several library programs across the state. Certain programs were already included in the Governor's proposed budget and advocates were simply asking legislators to approve these programs. In other cases, advocates were asking for specific amounts of funding for specific programs to be included in the appropriations process.

ACTION: LEGISLATIVE DAY

The Minnesota Library Association (MLA) and the Minnesota Educational Media Organization (MEMO) co-hosted their 2013 Minnesota Library Legislative Day on March 6th. They scheduled 35 different meetings with state representatives' offices for 24 advocates.

On the day of the event, MLA/MEMO provided an hour and a half of orientation, including a briefing for advocates on key library policy issues. Advocates were then given two folders with materials for the day—one for them to use, and one for them to leave behind with constituents—and sent out to begin their meetings (please see the attachment below for a list of suggested items to include in each folder). Each meeting had at least one leader, who either had past experience advocating or was more familiar with the policy issues at hand.

On the day of the event, MLA/MEMO provided advocates with a two folders. One contained information for the advocates themselves, and one contained information for the legislators that advocates were meant to leave after their meetings.

During their meetings, advocates discussed key issues with legislators. The materials they presented were clear, informative, and visually pleasing. They also ensured that they made each request in such a way that it illustrated the how libraries and their programs were directly benefiting Minnesota constituents. This is a vital element of effective advocacy. Representatives are concerned with the betterment of their constituencies, and therefore if they can be shown that specific programs will directly impact the people they represent in a positive way, they are far more likely to take measures to effect the requested change.

WHAT TO TAKE AWAY

1. Be concise and keep content relevant – Legislators are always busy. They skim documents and have little time for meetings. In both your meetings and the papers you leave behind, get right to the point and don't get side-tracked.
2. Use specifics – Any survey data or information highlighting specific programs is much more effective than talking in generals. Requests should also be specific—know how much money you're asking for and what programs you're looking to advance.
3. Link requests to constituents – Legislators are concerned with their constituents. Demonstrating how constituents use libraries and their programs to make their lives better and easier will make legislators more likely to remember and act upon your request.
4. Be confident and passionate! – Legislators need to see that you care about the issues you're advocating for. Confidence comes from a combination of pre-meeting preparation, experience in your field, and passion for what you're asking for.

What MLA/MEMO included in folders for legislators

- **ONE-PAGE (DOUBLE SIDED) OVERVIEW OF MLA/MEMO:** MLA/MEMO created a double-sided cover page. The front was headed by a simple picture of an open book and the simple, eye-catching slogan: *Minnesota Libraries. So much more than you expect.* This was followed by three brief informative paragraphs that explained how **school, public, and academic** libraries were all critical for community development and education in Minnesota. In a column on the side of the page, they also included highly relevant statistics from a recent University of Minnesota survey conducted on the role of libraries in Minnesota communities.

On the back, they outlined in bullet points of the key policy issues and programs for which they were advocating, explaining how these directly correspond to the interests of the State of Minnesota and its constituents.

- ***Why include this?*** The front of this page provides concise, informative information on the types of libraries in Minnesota, what they offer, and direct statistics showing that the programs they offer matter to Minnesota constituents. The back provides a summary of their legislative agenda for legislators to refer to after the meeting, as well as a web link if the legislator or staffer is interested in finding more information.
- **A FEW VISUALLY APPEALING AND INFORMATIVE ONE-PAGERS:** MLA/MEMO also provided legislators with four pieces of paper that further highlighted the importance of library programs to Minnesotans and their extensive nature. The first described **MiniTex**, an information and resource sharing program of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and the University of Minnesota Libraries. This page provides more data from the survey conducted by the University of Minnesota on the role of libraries in communities, but it does so in a way that is easy to read, and it includes relevant color pictures.

The second page is a colorful **flow-chart** detailing the ways in which specific types of libraries (school, public, and academic) directly impact the lives of Minnesotans of all ages. Again, it is easy to follow and concise, yet informative.

The last two sheets of paper were colorful **maps** of Minnesota. One map depicted the Minnesota Regional Public Library Systems, while the other showed the Minnesota Multitype Library Cooperation Systems. These maps demonstrate that the Minnesota library network extends throughout the state and is accessible to all Minnesotans. Both maps also include contact information for each library or cooperation system, as well as links where legislators can find more information following the meeting.

- ***Why include this?*** A few informative one-pagers are helpful for legislators and their staff to refer to after meetings to remind them of information shared during the meetings. These documents should be polished, easy to read/skim, and informative. Only a few should be included—provide legislators with information, but don't overwhelm them—and all the information should be directly related to the issues and requests.
- **ASSORTMENT OF PAMPHLETS, FLYERS, BOOKMARKS, AND BUSINESS CARDS:** MLA/MEMO included a handful of polished, informative resources on various programs and events hosted by Minnesota libraries. These included information on a state-wide homework help program for students, job search assistance, small business advancement resources, the Minnesota Book Awards, and the Electronic Library for Minnesota. These pamphlets specifically highlight all of the resources libraries provide to assist Minnesotans in their day-to-day lives.
- ***Why include this?*** These provide quick resources that legislators can glance through, and they illustrate the depth of resources libraries can provide to help constituents. They show that the libraries are constantly active and looking for ways to make a true difference in people's lives.

Case Study: Creating Your Library's 'Quick Facts' Resource Guide

The Lake Agassiz Regional Library (LARL) in Minnesota created a useful brochure entitled 'Quick Facts' that provided patrons with some basic but important information on the LARL system and how they could take advantage of it. Throughout the pamphlet, they used concise bullet points and bolded important words and phrases in these bullets to make this brochure informative and easy to skim.

On the **front cover** of the brochure, they include a map of the region LARL serves with points on the map for branch locations and what LARL calls LINK Sites (areas within already-established community spaces, such as community centers or retirement homes, where small collections of popular items are housed). This makes it easy for patrons to find the sites closest to them. They also include the LARL mission below this map to outline the objective of LARL.

The panels inside the brochure are split into different categories. The first, titled '**General Information,**' provides information on how LARL fits into the greater Minnesota library network, its funding and governing structures, the logistics of materials loans among LARL libraries, and the counties and cities it serves. It gives patrons a brief overview of what the system is and how it works in a way that is easy to read.

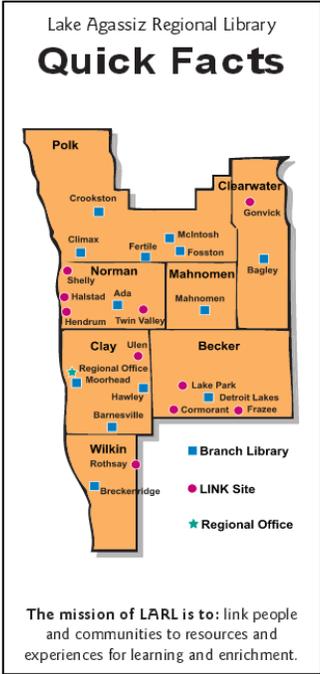
Another panel, labeled '**LARL Statistics,**' provides numbers to demonstrate the regional library's value to the community and its successes. This includes facts such as the number of patrons it serves and the number of square miles its services cover, the size of its staff, the number of reference questions its staff answered in the last year, and the number of resources available through the system. Hard statistics like these indicate the library system's success in accomplishing its mission of linking people and communities to enriching resources that foster lifelong learning. They are helpful both to patrons who want to know more about what their library offers, as well as to legislators who may be interested in the breadth and past success of the system when considering funding requests.

A third panel outlines some LARL **projects**. These range from a self-service checkout process and new non-Internet computers for children with educational games to wireless availability in all branches and LINK Sites and progress on their Strategic Plan. This panel also specifically explains LINK Sites, a unique and integral aspect of LARL, in more detail.

This information shows that LARL is actively working on improving the services and programs they offer by outlining specific projects that are underway. It also highlights the LINK Sites project, which is an innovative way of making high-demand materials more readily available to patrons in the community.

The fourth panel, titled '**Closing Thoughts,**' summarizes the value LARL brings to Minnesota communities through its programs and services in the community. By explaining how community members can directly benefit from educational programming, various formats of library materials, and research assistance, LARL is making patrons aware of just how important libraries are in their community and is thereby advocating for the system's continued presence and growth within the community.

The final panel is an area where patrons can write **branch-specific information** such as the address, contact information, hours, and unique features of the branch nearest them. Including this panel makes it more likely that patrons will keep this brochure and continue to refer to it. Thus, not only will they always have their branch-specific information easily on hand, but they will have also keep the information on what their branch provides and why it's important.



My Branch Information
Just fill in the blanks!

_____ Library,
a branch of Lake Agassiz Regional Library

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Hours:
Monday _____
Tuesday _____
Wednesday _____
Thursday _____
Friday _____
Saturday _____
Sunday _____

Unique services, events, materials, etc.:

Case Study: Massachusetts Library Association

Hosting a Legislative Breakfast

OBJECTIVE

A legislative breakfast provides an effective forum in which librarians can advocate for legislative priorities. The Massachusetts Library Association (MLA) suggests hosting a breakfast prior to a library legislative day. This is effective as it allows legislators to travel to local libraries and see first-hand the services and programs these libraries provide to benefit constituents. A subsequent legislative lobby day is then likely to be more effective because legislators have first-hand experience with the library and will have already listened to the requests in a lighter, more informal setting.

PROCESS

Planning the Breakfast (August-October): In order to begin planning legislative breakfasts, the MLA has formed a standing committee to oversee and coordinate the process by assisting the host libraries. The standing committee typically begins meeting sometime between August and October (about four to six months in advance of the planned breakfast). In Massachusetts, the state legislature begins discussions on the following year's budget in March or April. MLA members, therefore, generally work to plan their breakfasts for some time between the end of January and early March. A breakfast followed by a legislative lobby day around this time of the year ensures library requests are in the minds of legislators early in the process. The MLA has also found 8-9am on Friday mornings the best time to host a legislative breakfast. In Massachusetts, legislators tend to be in their districts on Fridays, and 8-9am does not generally interfere with the rest of their schedule for the day.

Preparing for the Breakfast (November-January): After a date and time has been set, the MLA standing committee meets with the host librarians to begin planning the event itself. They set a budget, decide on a menu, and discuss logistics, as well as potential speakers and programming. In conjunction, they send out fundraising letters to trustees and friends of the library to raise funds for the event. Once the programming and speakers have been decided upon and confirmed, the host librarians and the standing committee begin to draft formal invitations and a list of invitees for the event, with the intent to send them out one or two months prior to the event.

Hosting the Breakfast (January-March): The MLA has found that it is important to keep track of the people that attend so the host library can get a sense of who is interested in their library's issues and who they may be able to reach out to for future events. Therefore, host libraries generally create a sign-in sheet for the event that includes a space for the participant to leave a phone number and email address. It is also important to make sure host librarians are familiar with the legislative issues and requests, have clear talking points, and are comfortable discussing them with legislators.

After the Breakfast: After hosting a successful legislative breakfast, the MLA standing committee asks the host librarians and administrators to send thank-you notes to the legislators that attended the event. The standing committee also sends thank-you notes to the host librarians. These serve to demonstrate that the library and the MLA are grateful for the time and energy it took librarians to put the breakfast together and for the willingness of legislators to attend and listen to the MLA's requests. Finally, it is important to continue to maintain contact between legislators, event attendees, and the host library to make sure the legislative objective of the breakfast is realized.

Check out some more information including sample invitations, programs, thank you notes, and fundraising letters here: <http://www.masslib.org/ToolkitBreakfasts>.

THE BREAKFAST MENU

MLA Legislative Breakfast menus can vary widely. They can consist of a continental breakfast, a full sit-down meal, or something in between. The extent of the menu generally depends on the library's budget for the event.

FOLLOWING UP WITH LEGISLATORS, DONORS, AND SPEAKERS

Receiving a confirmation of attendance from the legislator's office is important. It is therefore necessary to follow up on invitations when you haven't heard anything back from the office. It is also important to follow up on fundraising requests to ensure you meet your budget goals for the event and to stay in touch with your speakers to ensure they are prepared for the event.

CONTINUE THE ACTION!

Legislative breakfasts have proven a wonderful way to get the MLA's requests heard. However, legislative requests are likely to be far more successful if breakfasts are accompanied by subsequent days of action.

Many libraries choose to also participate in a legislative lobby day, where they send advocates to the legislators' offices to meet with staff and directly discuss their requests.

Some also choose to hold follow-up breakfasts September, around the time the state budget is actually in formation, to ensure that their requests have not been forgotten about in the month after budget discussions began.