

All for One: Community Partnerships



**Forging a shared
literacy mission that
benefits everyone**

Presented by **The Association of Booksellers for Children (ABC)** in conjunction with the **The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)**, a division of The American Library Association (ALA)

Introduction



Public libraries and bookstores share many common goals:

to provide a community center for the exchange of ideas, to connect readers to great books, to encourage a love of reading for all ages, and to inspire people with great authors and programs. Yet often bookstores and libraries miss the opportunity to work together to their mutual benefit because they stumble over their differences rather than build on their shared values.

There are many benefits to working together including:

- **Cultivating new customers/audience.** Don't assume your patron is their patron. It's surprising how many library patrons don't visit bookstores, and how many bookstore customers never visit the library. Yet both groups are book lovers, and exactly the demographic you (and they) want to reach.
- **Pooling limited resources to great effect.** At a time where margins are shrinking and public funding is tight, these partnerships can significantly extend the reach of both organizations in serving their respective patrons.
- **Gaining a higher public profile.** Joint programming and events are newsworthy and great opportunities for generating media attention.
- **Amplifying Buy Local initiatives that support local tax revenue.** Supporting local businesses supports the local tax base which has a direct effect on library funding. Invest in supporting Buy Local movements in your area as a community building effort.
- **Creating great events that neither institution could do alone.** Bookstores often need a bigger venue. Libraries can't sell books. Working together we can create wonderful events where everyone wins—especially the community.
- **Supplementing your acquisitions efforts.** Depending on your policies for acquisitions, many bookstores have set up successful donation programs for libraries in their stores. You tell the store the books on your list, they build a display or special shelf, and offer a discount on any book bought for the library, as well as a discount on another book. The customer can sign a book plate for the donation. It's a win-win-win!

Understanding the bookstore perspective



Any good partnership begins with understanding where your partner is coming from.

One of the bookseller complaints we often hear about building these relationships goes something like this...

“I have tried to work with my local library, but because I am a business, they won’t even post flyers for free events. How do I build a relationship with basic hurdles in the way?”

To that end, here are a few key things bookstores want you to know:

- **No one is getting rich selling books.** A healthy profit margin in the book business is only about 5%. Most stores are surviving on about 2%. That makes bookselling one of the least profitable businesses there is, and a very difficult way to make a living. Booksellers are selling books because of one reason: they LOVE books. It’s probably the same reason you became a librarian.
- **Independent bookstores are local businesses which contribute to the local tax base. That makes them part of your constituency too.** It would be great to shift away from thinking of bookstores as “for-profit competition” and toward thinking of bookstores as community members and community partners in the drive for literacy.
- **There are many ways to partner: bookstores sometimes need help getting beyond the idea of selling you books as the only path toward profitable partnership.** Many times your buying policies preclude buying from your local bookstore. That doesn’t mean there aren’t other productive ways to build a partnership.
- **Staff changes often require constant bridge building.** Keep investing.

Bottom Line: Before undertaking a community partnership with your local bookstore it is important to broaden your perspective on exactly how you might work together. The most profitable potential partnership you have with a bookstore is in the area of joint programming and promotion.

Getting Started



Now what?

Getting these relationships started can be tricky. You may have tried and given up, or perhaps you're overwhelmed and don't know where to start. Here's what we suggest.....

Articulate your vision

If you have tried to approach your local bookstore and haven't had any luck, make sure you are doing a good job explaining where your community mission overlaps and how everyone can benefit. Articulate the reasons (besides sales) that you would like to form a partnership. [Refer to page 2.] You can draft a letter, an e-mail, a fact sheet, or just do it in person, but it is critical that you internalize these ideas so that you can be persuasive. Make sure you address the concrete benefits, emphasize service to the community, and expanding everyone's readership. Most bookstores will be open to suggestion.

Get the lay of the land

Are you a bookstore patron? Do you know what the current programs are? Is there a public relations or programming person who books events? Being familiar with the programs & organizational structure is an important part of making a thoughtful overture.

Take a bookseller to lunch—Start with the question “How might we be able to work together?”

Booksellers are generally a very nice bunch who appreciate great conversation, and who would love to join you for an outing. When you extend the invitation explain that you are interested in figuring out how your organizations could work together, because you see it as part of your community mission. Approach the date as a fact-finding mission, and see what comes up. Here are some questions to get you started:

- *What's your biggest challenge these days?*
- *If we were to do some programming together, is there someone on your staff I should speak to specifically?*

- *Have you ever considered a book donation program? What about a joint reading group or teen interest program?*
- *What is the most exciting area of programming you have going?*

Propose the first program

After you've had a chance to think about what you've learned, propose a first program based on your resources and the input you got from your fact-finding luncheon. [See the IDEAS THAT WORK section at the end for a list of possible ideas.]

If you've never worked on a joint project before, start small and build. Great starters include a Book Dedication Program, jointly organized Book Clubs, a new book night hosted by the library where booksellers present, and cross-promotion of store and library programs in your respective e-newsletters.

It is better to promise less and deliver more than the other way around. That being said, these programs build, so don't be afraid to ramp it up!

Overcoming Common Roadblocks

We have a policy against working with any for-profit businesses.

Local businesses pay local tax dollars, and are as much a part of the local community as any of the other patrons. If your library has an attitude or policies that are anti-partnership, then articulate your case for a shared literacy/community mission and take it to the management. Try to pitch a program that doesn't involve sales or money exchanging hands as a starter. Alternately, work with your local bookstore to develop a community-wide initiative with a number of partners to broaden the impact. If you can demonstrate a tangible benefit in terms of readership or dollars flowing IN to the library, more the better.



I've tried making contact with my bookstore, but they show no interest.

Bookselling is an extremely challenging business, and it is getting more so by the day. In most small bookstores, everyone is wearing many hats, and they may not have the time or energy to take on an ambitious project. However, make a specific project pitch to them that has tangible benefits to both the store and the library, and most stores will be interested. The more specific the idea, the better. If you structure the offer so that you are working on it together, it is likely that you have just gotten your partnership off the ground.

Every year we pay for authors to come to our Library, but the bookstore down the street has many authors come to visit for free. We always seem to be in competition for the same audience. This is one area where there is a significant difference in how bookstores and libraries operate. As part of their frontlist marketing, publishers put authors on the road to bookstores for promotional events at no cost to the store. If your library is in a major metropolitan area this will be more common. Although it is not the intention of the bookstore to compete with your audience, it sometimes feels that way.

However, this can actually be turned to your mutual benefit because often bookstores aren't in large enough areas to draw authors unless they have a presentation partner, and the library is a good example. You can work with your local bookstore to draw authors to your community through a community-wide reads program, co-presented author & school visits & other kinds of programs. The more successful you are the more publishers are likely to think of your community for future events. You can have access to many more authors than you could afford to bring yourselves.

Start small, perhaps with an author breakfast, and then work up from there. Work out an arrangement where you [or your friends of the library association] share in the proceeds of book sales at the event, and you will be well on your way to a long-lasting presenting partnership.

Ideas that Work



Here's a veritable smorgasbord of ideas from ABC booksellers who have successful partnerships with their local libraries. We have arranged them by degree of ambition and complexity. We encourage you to start small and grow these programs over time.

STARTERS

- **Shared cross-promotion of reading club programs.** If your library does a reading club, the local store can stock the book, as well as related titles. Librarians can direct readers to the store, and the store can promote the library program as well. Some stores offer discounts to club members.
- **Stores can offer customer service training to library staff as an in-service.** Many libraries require staff to take continuing education, and retail-oriented customer service is a big topic in the design of newer libraries. Most bookstores would be happy to offer a seminar on retail customer service best practices.
- **A galley grab for staff or for young readers.** Bookstores usually have a sea of galleys to give away, in some cases many more than ever filter down to local branches. They're happy to share them with you!
- **Booktalking—sharing advance information.** One ABC store has a casual monthly get-together of all the local kids' books enthusiasts (mostly librarians) to talk through the hot new titles. They serve wine and nibbles, and have a great time. They also share information about upcoming events, and get feedback about program ideas. This is something you can easily host at the library. You can also offer this as a complimentary program for parents at the library.
- **Co-sponsored Game nights/Anime nights.** Many libraries with strong YA programs are offering (Video)Gaming, Genre, and Anime nights for teens. Bookstores love to sponsor these programs, and stock whatever books these kids are interested in.

- **Book dedication program.** Work with the store to initiate an ongoing program for customers to buy a book for the local library that will be dedicated in their name. One store suggests young readers do it on their birthday, so they can donate their favorite book every year. Many stores offer beautiful bookplates for inscription, complementary delivery to the library, and a discount to the customer or a percentage credit to the library for additional book purchases. In return you can promote the program in the library, and direct patrons to the store.
- **Buy a Book, be a Hero.** A variation on the dedication program. Work with the store to develop a wish list, and let customers buy them for your local library or classroom.

INTERMEDIATE

- **Literary Theme Parties.** Partner with the store for a thematic party around a major book release. (Think HP3, or Twilight.)
- **Local Author Nights.** Co-sponsor a luncheon or evening with a group of local authors at the library. One ABC store does a moveable feast, and another invites local authors to speak on various thematic topics related to writing and current events.
- **Literary Scavenger Hunts.** Work with the store to develop an annual scavenger hunt through some of the more obscure holdings of the library. Esoteric reference books, periodical bind-ups, and classics are all great material. Stores can offer the winners a gift certificate, and make sure you get the local paper's attention. Celebrate the non-wired world.

ADVANCED

- **Community Reads program.** Known by different names, these are programs where the town/library/bookstore collaborates to get everyone reading the same book. Programs can be as simple as an online discussion board, and as elaborate as an entire week of events culminating in a gala author appearance. These programs have a lead time of a year or more, and are most effective when multiple private and public organizations participate. In most states, these programs are already happening, but bookstores are not yet sponsors. See a national searchable list here: <http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/onebook/>.

Check out these successful examples:

<http://www.mydesertrose.com/napervillereads/default.html>

<http://bigread.wustl.edu/>

<http://www.browncountyreads.org/press.html>

www.sandwichreadstogether.org

- **Children’s Author’s Breakfast.** These programs range from one keynote author to a moveable feast with a dozen authors or more. These can be planned as part of a local book fair, with a local conference, or as an in-service for local teachers and librarians. Anderson’s/Naperville, IL, which hosts one of the largest of these programs, started out with one author at a country club. Now they have a moveable feast with local IL authors, and four national authors. The event is part of an extensive city-wide literacy celebration. (<http://andersonsbookshop.com/childrensliteraturebreakfast.php>)
- **An annual Book Fair or Literary Festival.** These are more ambitious events, but they also hold the most potential for wide-spread community support and news-worthiness. Discussing starting one is an entire lecture in and of itself, but we recommend you check out these resources for more information:

The Decatur Book Festival (founded in 2005)

<http://www.decaturookfestival.com/2010/about-dbf/index.php>

Library of Congress list of Bookfairs by State

<http://www.read.gov/resources/statefairs.php>

This site also lists “One Book” projects by author or state