Advocating for Your Library: The E’s of Libraries® and Collecting Stories

WITH ALAN FISHEL & LORI FISHER
The E's of Libraries

- Education
- Employment
- Entrepreneurship
- Empowerment
- Engagement
With Respect to Libraries, What is the Reality-Perception Gap?
The Reality-Perception Gap

- On a scale from Essential, to Nice-to-Have, to Obsolete
- Reality: Libraries are Essential in numerous ways -- including with respect to the key roles they play regarding Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement
- Perception: While some people recognize that libraries are Essential, many other people believe that libraries are just Nice-to-Have, and still others believe that libraries are Obsolete
The Reality-Perception Gap

Why Does it Matter that there is a Reality-Perception Gap?

• Many people who could significantly help libraries obtain the resources or partnerships they need are not willing to do so because they don’t realize that libraries are Essential, and do not know all, or even most, of the main activities in which libraries engage.
Why Does the Reality-Perception Gap Exist?
The Reality-Perception Gap Exists for Two Main Reasons:

- Past Perceptions of Libraries that Still Linger
- Libraries Do Not Have One Dominant Activity
Past Perception Hurdle

• Many people view libraries based on their past perceptions – they believe libraries are a good place to go to borrow books, but believe they are now largely outdated.

• Other people view libraries as primarily providers of information, but think that any information you need can be found online.
Lack of One Dominant Activity Hurdle

- Libraries do many great things; they do not, however, have one dominant specific function.
- Most entities that are viewed as essential have one dominant activity (e.g., schools educate and hospitals heal).
Effectively Addressing the Hurdles

- Libraries must utilize messaging that effectively addresses the hurdles in order to eliminate the Realty-Perception Gap.

- Messaging that does not effectively address the hurdles can still have value for internal distribution (it can make those in the library community feel good about what they do). But given such messaging does not effectively address the hurdles, it will never have the desired external impact as it will not change the mindset of many people outside of the library community who view libraries as either Nice-to-Have or Obsolete.
Remember:
If you advocate in a way that is very persuasive in your mind, but not in theirs.....
IT WILL NOT WORK
A Secret to Successful Advocacy:

Don't tell them what you want to say.

Tell them what they need to know.
How The E’s of Libraries Addresses the Hurdles

- **Addressing the Past Perception Hurdle:** Once people become familiar -- in a persuasive (to them), memorable, and organized way -- with the categories of activities in which libraries are involved, which categories virtually everyone agrees are connected to Essential matters, the public perception will change.

- **Addressing the Lack of One Dominant Activity Hurdle:** The E’s of Libraries takes what can be a negative in terms of messaging (i.e., the jack of all trades concept), and turns it into a positive.
The E’s of Libraries

- Education
- Employment
- Entrepreneurship
- Empowerment
- Engagement
Education

- **Early Childhood Learning**
  Reading to Children • Helping children learn how to socialize with others • Providing learning strategies for parents to use at home

- **K-12 Education**
  Homework support • Supplementing school curriculum with technology, active learning, and experiences • Fighting the “summer slide” or this year the even longer “pandemic slide”

- **Adult Education**
  Adult reading/literacy classes • High school diploma equivalency courses/GED • Supporting college/community college education
Employment

• **Self-Evaluation**
  Helping patrons understand what skills they have • Helping patrons understand what skills they need • Helping patrons understand how to go about obtaining those skills

• **Skill-Building**
  Free classes and educational programs • Access to online training and expert guidance • Collection/materials

• **Finding and Landing the Job**
  Resume preparation support • Job search resources/job fairs • Application completion support/Interview training programs
Entrepreneurship

• **Area of Interest Exploration**
  Access to online content and databases and expert guidance • Collections/materials • Business training programs
  
• **Facilitating Connections**
  Identifying social networks and peer-groups • Social media training • Connecting with applicable government officials and regulators

• **Identifying Resources for Funding and Growing Your Business**
  Assistance drafting business/marketing plans • Identifying potential venture capitalists and private investors • Identifying potential government/public funding sources/grant opportunities
Empowerment

- **Financial, Technology, and Health Literacy**
  - Basic budgeting classes and free tax preparation
  - Computer coding classes
  - Free child screenings & telehealth counseling

- **Civic and Legal Literacy**
  - eGovernment access/community information
  - Voter resources
  - Legal aid workshops

- **Support for Underserved Populations**
  - English language learning classes
  - Services for veterans
  - Book delivery for homebound, meal programs for children/seniors
Engagement

• **Learning**
  Cooking, sewing, dance, exercise, art, writing, and life skills classes • Makerspaces and STEM centers • Educational competitions, human libraries

• **Social**
  Book clubs, author visits, and book club kits • Meeting/venue for celebrations, performances, and networking • Social services hub (housing, mental health, welfare)

• **Community**
  Town Halls, candidate forums, debates, voting and ballot dropoff locations • Festivals and cultural events • Outreach to community to help define needs/gaps
Using The E’s of Libraries
External Advantages

• **Understandable** – This messaging consists of terms that are very familiar and understandable to both people in the library community AND people outside of the library community

• **Supportable** – This messaging focuses on the types of activities that funders and prospective business partners want to support

• **Essential** – The categories of activities that comprise The E’s of Libraries are generally viewed as Essential, and not Nice-to-Have or Obsolete

• **Memorable** – This messaging helps people outside of the library community learn what libraries do in a way that they are far more likely to remember
Using The E’s of Libraries
Internal Advantages

- **Common Language**
  This messaging allows both people in the library community, and those supporting the library community, to use a common language to discuss the specific areas in which libraries engage.

- **Easy**
  The organization embedded in this messaging makes it much easier for the library community, and those supporting the library community, to successfully engage in, and have confidence in their ability to successfully engage in, advocacy on behalf of libraries.
Tailoring the Message
At a meeting or presentation

- No need to use all of The E’s: Use only the E’s that are relevant to that meeting or presentation.

- With respect to The E’s that are relevant to that meeting or presentation, there is no need to use all of the categories or subcategories of those E’s: Use only the categories and subcategories that are needed at that meeting or presentation.

- Example: If you are meeting with, or presenting to, a group that cares only about K-12 education, you will likely only discuss the E of Education and the subcategory involving K-12.

- Cautionary Note: Be ready to discuss any other E’s, categories, or subcategories that are potentially relevant to your meeting or presentation, so if the audience surprises you and is interested in those, you are ready.
Flexibility with The E’s

If The E’s that best fit your library include others not listed above, or do not include some of the ones listed above:

Change the list for your library. Add to the list, subtract from it, or both.
Flexibility with The E’s

• Some other possible E’s:
  o Enrichment
  o Exploration
  o Economy (for example, some libraries have used this instead of Employment and Entrepreneurship)

• You can also use The E’s to discuss other benefits relating to libraries, including:
  o Equity (what libraries help create)
  o Expertise (what librarians and staff provide)
  o Ease (accessibility of the library)
  o Everyone (who libraries serve)
  o Everywhere (where libraries are)
Where The E’s of Libraries Has Been Used...
It Has Worked!

ALA American Library Association
Proving Your Library’s Value: Persuasive, Organized, and Memorable Messaging

www.alastore.ala.org/unitedprovingvalue

VIRTUAL15

Valid beginning 6/15/20 through 6/29/20 for 15% off any online purchase of $40.00 or more at alastore.ala.org. ALA Members receive 25% off with code.*

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Telling the Library Story – Story Structure

http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy-bootcamp-resources

5 elements to a good, short & compelling library story:

• **The Person** (need a real person whose name has been changed)
• **The Problem** (the person’s problem, not the library’s problem – emotional hook)
• **Library Intervention** (library as secondary character to person, providing assistance to address their problem)
• **Happy Ending** (problem solved or in process of being solved)
• **ONE FACT** (only one statistic that directly relates)
How to Use Your Library Stories

• Share them with your Budget Committee presentations or your community group presentations (Rotary Club, for example)

• Encourage your staff to bring at least one new library story to monthly staff meeting

• Directors can share one library story at each monthly Board of Trustees meeting

• Staff liaison to Friends group or Foundation can share one library story at each meeting

• Train your Board and Friends about how those stories are created so that they can try their hand at crafting their own to tell (some will not want to do this and that is OK)

• Write down stories/collect them for your library (use categories for important services/audiences/needs) – Great to reuse!
Collecting/Using Statewide Library Stories

• Each ALA state chapter has access to the Engage platform (used for connecting stakeholders to legislators), which can also be used to collect stories from state chapter members

• Major tip: if you are trying to collect stories to use with your US Representatives or Senators and their District offices, make sure to narrow story collection to their particular areas of concern (visit their web sites and do research)

• Use these stories during regular outreach to District offices (you are doing regular outreach to your US Rep/Senator district offices, right??)

• Share targeted stories during an online meeting with your state chapter or local library cooperative and your US Rep/Senator (or their staff who attend)
United for Libraries

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