Making Our Voices Heard

Citizens Speak Out for Libraries!

Part III: The Advocacy Campaign

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The Advocacy Campaign

Making Your Voices Heard!

It’s Time for Advocacy

- There will come a time when your library faces a budgetary crisis or when significant funds are needed for new buildings, renovations, expensive automation upgrades or some other capital expense.
- In a perfect world, the library will only have to ask the powers that be in the community and the money would be added to the budget.
- Because we’re not in a perfect world, it is much more likely that the library will have to battle “city hall” to get the funding it needs.
It’s Time for Advocacy

- If you have waged a good public awareness campaign (see Part II of this guide), you will have a much easier time making the case for the library and convincing leaders and citizens in your community.
- Even if you haven't, you can make the case for your library and help your library get the funding it needs.
- Waging a successful advocacy campaign means getting a critical mass of support from the citizens in your community.
- Whether it’s getting them to go out and vote “yes” for a library issue on the ballot or whether it’s getting them to help influence the decision makers to increase funding for the library – you need to activate the power of the people!!

Knowing When the Time is Right

- If the Friends, Library administration and Trustees already have a good working relationship, it is quite likely that the library director has alerted the Friends to the crisis and enlisted their help.
- Sometimes, however, Friends and Trustees hear about impending cuts and may have to go to the director to see how they can help.
A Note to Friends

- For any number of reasons, a director might not alert Friends and even Trustees when he/she sees a budget cut on the horizon and if they do, they explicitly ask the Friends and Trustees not to do anything.
- Some of the reasons include:
  - Many directors are employees of the city (v. of the Trustees) and fear for their jobs.
  - Some directors want to be seen as “team players” among their city peers.
  - Some library directors believe they can manage a budget cut through service reductions or restructuring.
  - Unfortunately, some library directors don’t want to “rock the boat.”

Getting the Director on Board

- While in the best situations the director of the library will be coming to Friends and Trustees for help, there will be some groups who have to go to the director.
- Because his or her involvement or at least approval of the campaign is critical, you should take time to sit down with the director and talk about:
  - The impending budget cuts.
  - The need for better budget.
  - The need to get city leadership buy-in for a new building.
  - Other capital needs.
Is the Director Always Right?

- With all due respect for the genuine reasons for reticence by the director the library, in the end, belongs to the community.
- That’s why members of the community can have such a tremendous impact through advocacy.
- However, without the support of the library administration, it is unlikely that you’ll have much success, and if you do, it will probably be at the expense of a good working relationship in the future.
- In the end, if the director is not supportive it is not the right time for advocacy.

A Note to the Director

- It’s likely you have some genuine concerns and don’t want to “rock the boat.”
- For any number of reasons, you may not have alerted Friends and even Trustees about an impending cut, or you may have explicitly ask the Friends and Trustees not to do anything.
- Some of the reasons include:
  - You are an at-will employee of the city (v. of the Trustees) and fear for your job.
  - You may want to be seen as a “team player” among your city peers who are also facing tough times ahead.
  - You may believe you can manage a budget cut through service reductions or restructuring.
A Note to the Director:
Courage! Getting on Board

- It can, frankly, be a bit scary to “fight city hall” but take heart – Friends, Trustees and patrons are the ones to be visibly waging this campaign!
- It is, after all, the citizens’ library. That’s why members of the community can have such a tremendous impact through advocacy.
- However, without the support of the library administration, it is unlikely that they’ll have much success, and if they do, it will probably be at the expense of a good working relationship in the future.

A Note to the Director:
Getting on Board

- Sit down with your Friends and Trustees. Discuss your concerns. This campaign should not take place without your (behind-the-scenes) input. If your library really begins to reduce services, well-meaning supporters may wage a campaign without you – and who knows what they’ll ask for and why!
- Get involved so that you can control the message and the facts. Then all you need to do is go back to running the library while your Friends and Trustees run with the ball!
The first strategy meeting should include active members of the Friends (including members from the Friends executive board), Trustees (all of them if possible), and the library administration.

This meeting will depend on the library director to outline what is happening with the budget, what is at stake, and what services will be reduced or eliminated because of insufficient funding.

This group should continue as the core leadership group overseeing the campaign – the Coordinating Committee.

A discussion about this will help you develop your message for the campaign and allow your group to outline initial strategies for waging the campaign.

If the director is a city employee, he or she may have to bow out after this meeting but he or she should be willing to talk to the advocacy campaign’s leaders on an informal basis so that critical information can be included in the campaign as it progresses:

- The per cent of the budget being cut.
- The percent of the budget being asked for as an increase.
- Exactly what the required budget will mean in terms of service.
- What services will be cut if the budget is reduced.
- Other important “facts” that must be absolutely correct for your campaign to keep its credibility.
Agenda for the First Meeting of the Coordinating Committee

At the first strategy meeting:

- Understand exactly what the library is facing.
- Discuss the environment in which your campaign will operate:
  - Is the city council friendly to libraries?
  - Are there budget cuts to all departments?
  - Is the library well loved and well used?
  - Has there been an ongoing public awareness campaign so the library has enjoyed high profile in the community?

At the first strategy meeting (continued):

- Consider the types of strategies that will work best in your community.
- Discuss key citizens who should be brought into the campaign.
- Consider the funding that is available for an advocacy campaign.
- Discuss the kind of message you want to send the citizen – i.e. should they vote "yes," or should they take other actions to influence the budget decision makers.
- Vent, commit, and set a date and time for next meeting!
Agenda for the Second Meeting of the Coordinating Committee

At the second strategy meeting:
- Discuss goal.
- Discuss slogan for the campaign.
- Determine time line for the campaign.
- Discuss specific strategies to assure success.
- Identify the quantity and names of people who will be called upon to help.
- Discuss the resources available for the campaign.

Set a Goal

Be specific. Some examples:
- The Library referendum passes next October 14.
- The town council will pass a 10% increase for our library’s budget.
- Our library’s budget will not be cut for the next year.
Create a Slogan

- A catchy slogan will get the attention of the citizens on whom you are counting to help you influence town or city leaders or to get out and vote for the library.
- The slogan should be based on your goal and be adaptable to all types of media and campaign literature.
- The slogan doesn't have to be decided in one night! This often gets a lot of discussion and can take time away from other items on the planning agenda.
- Throw some ideas around then select two or three creative people from among you to bring ideas back to your next meeting.

Timing is Everything!

Before you launch your campaign, know the best timing for action:

- If there is to be a bond referendum; you’ll know the date but how far out is that?
- Do you want to campaign so far ahead of time that you lose steam or momentum?
- If you start a month before, will opposition coalesce?
Timing is Everything!

- If your campaign is to influence those who pass the library’s budget, understand clearly when the decision makers will see the budget for the first time – the public hearing may be too late if the die has already been cast.
- Find out when the city manager is presenting the budget to the council for the first time and set that time by which your campaign will be in full bloom.

Strategies – The Fun Part!

- How will you convince citizens to vote yes? -- or --
- How will you use citizens’ voices to influence the decision makers?
- You have lots of avenues and no doubt there will be many in your planning group who have very innovative ideas.
- Brainstorm ideas for communicating your message (see next slide).
- For more information on strategies, see Part II of this guide, “Raising Public Awareness.”
Communicating Your Message

- The city newspaper – even if you take out a paid ad the night before the vote or before the first budget presentation by the city manager.
- Op ed pieces.
- Letters to the editor – LOTS!
- Radio PSAs and talk shows.
- Television appearances on local talk shows.
- Flyers.
- Petitions.
- Postcards, letter writing, phone call campaigns.
- Friends newsletter.
- Presentations to local civic and community clubs.
- Create a media event.

Making the Strategies Work

- Think about what exactly you’ll be asking citizens to do (vote “yes,” or call their councilor, e.g.)
- Be sure every item in your campaign arsenal specifically asks citizens to take the action you want them to take.
- Develop and publish “talking points” about what your library needs and what is at stake if the library doesn’t get it.
- Everyone helping on this campaign needs to use the slogan and know the talking points so the message is always clear and consistent.
- As you decide the methods for getting the word out into community, think about what kinds of task forces you’ll need to cover all your bases.
Who Will Help with this Campaign?

- The more people you have helping to implement the strategies, the higher the likelihood that you'll realize your goals.
- Each person working on some aspect of the campaign will not only make the work easier, he or she will also be speaking out about the importance of the library’s goal at work, at social events, across the fence.
- Personal endorsement of the goal goes a long way and the more people involved, the more you’ll have that endorsement!

Who Will Help with this Campaign?

- Write a list of potential helpers – past trustees, retired staff, past Friends board members, loyal patrons of the library.
- Think, too, about lining up some VIP help for the campaign.
- Well known and highly respected members of the community can write op-eds, go on local TV talk shows, write a letter to the mayor, etc.
- When you know what strategies you’ll be using to make your case, you’ll have a rough idea of how many people you’ll need to lead and implement each strategy.
Organizing the Campaign Volunteers

- Each strategy will likely dictate a needed task force and each task force will need a chair.
- The chair of each task force will become part of the core leadership group and continue to meet with them on a weekly, or semi-monthly basis as the leadership group feels is necessary.
- The chair will be responsible for working with the volunteers on his or her task force and ensuring that the strategy is clear to all and that it is being implemented according to plan.
- See Part II, “Raising Public Awareness” for the types of task forces that will be needed.

Can We Wage this Campaign on a Shoestring?

- Absolutely. Larger cities with larger Friends groups may have enough money to hire a public relations firm to help with the campaign.
- Some Friends have even had the resources to develop professional videos about their needs and get them placed on television.
- BUT . . . This is much more about getting a critical mass on your side than about how much money you have to spend.
- The smaller your town, the fewer people you’ll have to reach in total and the more likely it is that you’ll have a much better knowledge about who will stand in your way and who you can count on to help.
- Sometimes small is easier!!
Can We do this for Free?

No, unfortunately there will be some costs if you really want to penetrate all available avenues for getting the word out. At a minimum:

- Flyers and costs for the paper and printing.
- Thank you letters to those who are helping along the way – postage and stationary.
- Letters to the city council or the town leaders – postage and stationary.
- Published talking points for every volunteer on your team – paper and printing.

What You Can do for Free

- Letters to the editor.
- Op-ed pieces.
- Petition drives.
- Telephone trees.
- Use your website to let visitors know what’s at stake and what they can do to help.
- Local radio and television talk shows.
- Presentations to local civic and community groups.
- Make the case in every issue of your newsletter outlining exactly what your readership can do to help.
What You *Should* Spend Money On

If you can beg, borrow or steal some money for a campaign the following are very effective strategies that do have costs attached:

- Post card campaign by citizens to decision makers.
- Radio PSAs.
- Advertisement(s) in the local paper.

Post Card Campaigns

A postcard campaign can give citizens a chance to tell their council members that they support the library. To be most effective you must:

- Include the library slogan.
- Be sure that there is room for a personal message.
- Pre-address and pre-stamp (to ensure maximum return).
- Do whatever it takes to make sure hundreds, if not thousands are sent. Stand near the library and ask patrons to write a sentence and sign, then *you* put the postcard in the mail.
- If you do not have large numbers this can backfire. A dribble of postcards going to city or town leaders will say “no one really cares about the library.”
- If you do have hundreds or thousands of postcards go out, it'll look like an avalanche to decision makers and can have an extremely powerful impact.
Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

- As discussed in Part II, you can get professionally developed PSAs (if your community has a local station). In fact, it’s possible you may be able to get the PSAs developed for free.
- Visit your local radio station and ask them if they would create some Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for the library as a contribution. If not, ask if they would do so at a discounted price.
- Next, work with the person at the radio station to discuss your goal. Show him or her the talking points for the campaign and share your slogan.
- Be sure the spots are explicit about what citizens can do to help and that you repeat your slogan.

You’ll likely have to pay for the airing of these ads since most stations won’t want to take a stand on a political issue.

However, try to negotiate a discount and work with the station on how many and when to air the ads given your target audience. They know the demographics and will help you with this.

This is a good expenditure of money because it’s a different venue than print and will have the effect of convincing listeners that this is a huge movement (an especially good thing for the decision makers to believe!).
Newspaper Advertisements

- If you've done a good job of creating a real "buzz" about the library and your campaign, you might be lucky enough to get a supportive editorial written about it.
- However, you can't count on it and the only way to truly "control" the message and ensure that it's published is to pay for it.
- A large display ad placed in the paper at a strategically important time in the campaign will have huge impact – especially if the ad once again says exactly what the reader should do to support the advocacy campaign (vote "yes," or call your council member – NOW" and even include the phone numbers of these council members, e.g.)

Newspaper Advertisements

- This ad will be expensive but the ad department at the paper can tell you what day and on page your ad will get the most "bang for the buck."
- Add a clip-and-send coupon for Friends membership at the bottom of the ad – in the end, you will probably get enough new members to cover the cost!
Creating a Media Event

- A successful media event will give your campaign a high profile and will actively engage the media often leading them to give your efforts more extensive media coverage all along the way.
- To get “news” coverage for your campaign, think about creating an event that your local television station or newspaper will want to cover. This event will have to be unusual and “newsworthy.”
- The media will consider a ground-swell, grassroots movement newsworthy but to get television coverage – you have to do something that is “visual.”

Ways to create “visual” events:

- Hold a rally on the library or city hall steps with placards touting your campaign slogan.
  - Make sure there are as many people as possible at the rally.
  - Ask VIPs in your community to speak out for your campaign at the rally using a bullhorn or microphone.
- Hold a petition drive.
  - Get as many people as you possibly can signing up to support your campaign.
  - Once you have hundreds or thousands of signatures, gather a large crowd of library supporters to “march on city hall” with the petitions to present to your city leaders.
Creating a Media Event

- Once you decide what kind of event you want to hold that is both "newsworthy" and "visual," be sure to let the news media know about it!
- Call your newspaper, radio, and television stations ahead of time and supply them with all the details ahead of time including:
  - What type of event you are planning
  - Why you are campaigning for the library
  - When the event will be held
  - Who will be present at the event (if VIPs are included)
- Follow the initial phone call with a letter reiterating the information above and include any written campaign literature you have as well.

A Few Notes About the Funding of the Campaign

- Whenever you pay for ads or other campaign materials be sure that you say (radio) or print, “This ad paid for by the Friends of Anytown Library” or “Paid for By Supporters of Anytown Library and Its Future.”
- Your 501(c)(3) status does allow for some spending on advocacy. What is not explicitly permitted is the support of your organization for a specific candidate running for office (see next slide).
A Few Notes About the Funding of the Campaign

- Non-profits can engage in advocacy.
- Though non-profits cannot lobby for a specific candidate, they can advocate for a “cause.” The generally accepted wisdom is that up to 10% of a group’s annual expenditures can be spent on advocacy.
- For more detailed information, please see IRS Publication 557, Chapter 3, Lobbying Expenditures.
- **But don’t forget** – most of your campaign will be “educating the public” about what is and is not possible with current or proposed library funding. “Educating the Public” does NOT constitute lobbying and does NOT have to be factored into your funding considerations for 501c3 status.

A Review

- In order to launch an advocacy campaign you need key library leaders to form a core committee to oversee the campaign and ensure follow-through.
- Set a goal and develop a message that will become your campaign slogan.
- Develop a set of strategies for getting a critical mass of your community on board to achieve your goal.
- Consider putting your publicity materials in other languages reflective of your population.
A Review

- Recruit as many volunteers as possible to help implement the strategies.
- Meet often and determine progress and keep momentum high.
- Thank everyone who helps either along the way or at the end of the campaign.
- Celebrate and evaluate! If you win – take a moment to rejoice. If you don’t, try to evaluate what went wrong and what you might do differently next time.

It’s All About You!

- Remember the Carnegie era? Carnegie didn’t just wave a check and magically libraries appeared.
- Carnegie libraries came about because citizens just like you in communities across America worked hard to change laws and raise money . . . and look at what we have as a result!
- Now it’s your turn! We have a legacy that is a national treasure, it’s up to us to ensure that we protect this treasure to hand safely over to the next generation!
Additional Resources for Advocacy


This book will provide you with over one hundred samples of brochures, bookmarks, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, and radio PSAs to help you design and wage an effective campaign. Ask your librarian to purchase or borrow this book through inter-library loan.

Additional Resources for Advocacy

- The American Library Association has a wealth of resources to help you wage an advocacy campaign including quotes and toolkits. Go to www.ala.org and click on “Issues and Advocacy.”
- The National Center for Educational Statistics has in-depth information on public libraries and education. Here you will find plenty of information to buttress your arguments for the important role your library plays in education. Go to http://nces.ed.gov/
Additional Resources for Advocacy

- Keith Curry Lance who works with the Colorado Department of Education has done an outstanding job of pulling together statistics for public, school and academic libraries. Here you will find the results of studies that directly make the link between excellent libraries and achievement in school. Check it out at [www.lrs.org](http://www.lrs.org).

- Be sure to contact your state library and let them know what your plans are. Not only will they be interested in monitoring your actions and your success; they can also provide you with much support ranging from telephone consultation, to in person consults, to important state library statistics, to print and online resources that can help!