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\(^1\) http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/03/advocacy/advocacy-is-a-must-for-public-library-trustees-advocates-corner/#

\(^2\) http://www.libraryedge.org/sites/default/files/Edge_Assessment_Workbook.pdf
Advocacy is a Must for Public Library Trustees

Library Journal Advocate’s Corner

By Jeffrey Smith on March 1, 2013

During my nearly five years as a member of the Board of Library Trustees for the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL), I have often been asked what this position entails. The obvious answer is that such service consists principally of attending – and being an active participant – at meetings of the board. Many library boards, Baltimore County’s included, have broad authority to set fee and fine levels, offer advice about the budget, adopt rules and regulations, and hire and review a director.

But a truly dedicated library trustee ought to be doing a good deal more than just attending regular board meetings. Perhaps most importantly, an active and engaged trustee must be a passionate advocate for the library. All public libraries rely upon a wide range of public support to ensure their viability. Especially during today’s fiscally challenging times, libraries need more vocal advocates than ever. It seems clear that trustees, as some of a library system’s more visible volunteers, need to make their voices heard with regard to advocacy as well.

In my experience, I have found that effective library advocacy may take a number of forms. Most obviously, library trustees, friends, and other community advocates should welcome opportunities that allow them to communicate their feelings about libraries directly to key decision-makers. Here in Maryland, I often take the time to share my feelings about BCPL with members of our county council, and also with members of our state legislature. Given that these elected officials control different funding streams that support my local library system, this outreach can help to ensure that my library receives its fair share of public dollars.

A few years ago, I had the chance to see just how fruitful such advocacy could be. Back in 2007, the Foundation for BCPL was soliciting funds to support construction of Storyville, an interactive children’s library to be located at BCPL’s Rosedale branch. As a member of the foundation board, I was actively engaged in seeking out potential donors to fully fund this over $750,000 project. After over a year’s worth of fund-raising (which had begun in late 2005), we were about halfway to this goal.

From my experience as a professional lobbyist for a number of public and private-sector entities, I was aware that non-profit organizations could request funding for projects as a part of Maryland’s annual capital budget. Working together with the foundation board, I was able to facilitate a request for $250,000 for the construction of Storyville. The centerpiece of this effort was a visible and highly-focused advocacy campaign – which included targeted marketing pieces, direct advocacy with legislators, and
outreach to the general public. A key component of these activities was demonstrating to legislators the vital importance of library services, especially those focused on young children.

The culmination of this advocacy was our hearing before members of the Maryland Senate’s Budget and Taxation Committee and the House of Delegates’ Appropriations Committee. These hearings were a great opportunity, regardless of whether or not our efforts were ultimately to be successful, to share with the legislature some of our enthusiasm for local public libraries in Baltimore County, Maryland. Positively, the Foundation for BCPL received $250,000 for Storyville – the first time that a library project had ever been funded through Maryland’s process for allocating legislative funding for local community initiatives. Two years later, in 2009, the foundation repeated this feat by garnering an additional $250,000 to help fund another Storyville site, at BCPL’s Woodlawn branch.

I believe that the lesson imparted by this case study is actually a very simple one. As the saying goes, “you’ll never know, unless you ask.” Had the Foundation for BCPL not asked for funding in the state capital budget for our project, in all likelihood it would have taken another year or two for us to raise sufficient funds to build the Storyville project. Thanks in part to this advocacy campaign, Storyville at Rosedale has welcomed over 320,000 visitors during its five years in operation.

While there are never any guarantees of success in advocacy, it is an absolute must for library trustees, library friends groups, and library foundation boards. If library advocates ever doubt this fact, perhaps they should recall these words from anthropologist Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

**About Jeffrey Smith**

Jeffrey Smith is President of the Foundation for the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL), as well as a member of the BCPL Board of Library Trustees, and board member of Citizens for Maryland Libraries. As a professional lobbyist for both public and private sector organizations, Smith has conducted successful legislative advocacy efforts through direct interaction with government officials at the federal, state, and local levels.
In this section you will find 3 benchmarks with 2-5 indicators each:

**Benchmark 4: Strategy and evaluation**

- 4.1: Relationships with community leaders (8 questions)
- 4.2: Gathering community feedback (7 questions)
- 4.3: Surveying patrons (4 questions)
- 4.4: Evaluation of programs and services (4 questions)
- 4.5: Information based strategic decisions (4 questions)

All of the indicators contain library activities which are designed to help the library better understand the needs of its community, build supportive relationships, and make strategic decisions. Most of the activities enumerated in the indicators are going to fall within the responsibilities of library directors, managers, board/foundation members, and elected officials.

To complete this section, you will need to gather information from library staff or other key informants involved in the following types of activities:

- Meeting with local community decision makers and elected officials
- Making presentations to community leaders
- Organizing staff technology training

Terms that appear with a dotted underline can be found online in the Edge Glossary.

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**Benchmark 5: Strategic partnerships**

- 5.1: Partnerships (8 questions)
- 5.2: Outreach activities (4 questions)

**Benchmark 6: Sharing best practices**

- 6.1: Participation in a community of practice (8 questions)
- 6.2: Gathering feedback (3 questions)

In this section you will find 3 benchmarks with 2-5 indicators each:

**Section 2: Engaging the Community & Decision Makers**