

# **A Primer for Holding a Librarians Build Communities Day in Your State or Locality**

This program fosters opportunities for librarians to give back to their communities and to interact with their patrons and future patrons outside the library space – while also increasing awareness of the specialized skills and knowledge that librarians possess. Hopefully, these volunteer efforts will expand the community who supports and advocates for librarians and libraries. (What better way to be known in your community than to share what you can do with those who don't already know!)

This primer was written by Group G of the 2012 Emerging Leaders, updated by Group F of the 2013 Emerging Leaders, borrowing heavily from [ALA's Library Snapshot Day Primer](#), by Peggy Cadigan.

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## **1. Why host LBC in your state?**

### **Advocacy – Communities Understanding Librarians' Value**

Library budgets continue to [fall or stay flat](#), across the United States, even as demands for our services go up. Part of the problem may be that our communities do not realize the extent of what librarians can do for them. For instance, OCLC found, in their [Perceptions of Libraries report](#), that the library's brand is still "books," and, although OCLC did not explore the question, many librarians know anecdotally that this extends to our brand as librarians, as well. ("So you get to read books all day?")

## Misconceptions About Librarians

One of the best possible ways to educate our communities about the skills of librarians and library staff—and, by extension, our value—is to work with people within our communities, *on projects that are important to them*, using those skills. If people see us outside of the context of libraries, working with technology, teaching, or doing any one of the many things we do that go beyond books, they will adjust their views of us—and of our value to the community.

## 2. How does LBC work?

There are several models for hosting “Librarians Build Communities” (LBC) in your area.

1) A state- or local-level librarian volunteer day.

An easy way to get LBC started at the local, state, or regional level is to hold a volunteer day in conjunction with a library conference. Step one is to identify community organizations, non-profits, and libraries in need of volunteers with librarian skill sets. Step two is to find volunteers among conference attendees and local libraries. Depending on the size of the group, the organizers might need to arrange transportation, food, t-shirts, or other amenities for the volunteers. The organizers would also want to take photos of the volunteer effort and solicit stories to go on the LBC Facebook page, to recognize volunteers after the event, and to keep the momentum of the event going.

2) A dispersed librarian volunteer day, perhaps state-wide.

A committee would coordinate with volunteers and organizations in various locations throughout the state, setting up volunteer days in several locations, simultaneously; in each location, the program would ultimately look a lot like #1 would, if it were run at the city level. We recommend at least a “practice run” in one city, before trying to run multiple simultaneous volunteer programs.

3) An ongoing program, where community organizations can ask for librarian-volunteers, and they’re matched up.

It might look a little bit like [this initiative](#), run by the California State Library, but with a focus on placing librarian-volunteers in organizations external to libraries.

### 3. LBC Committee

To ensure a successful LBC program, form an organization committee. The committee should include a representative from the host city (or, if you're holding multiple events simultaneously, one person from *every* host city) where the volunteer day will be occurring, to help with local arrangements and provide input on local organizations to approach with volunteer offers. You will also want to include someone from your state/regional library association, especially if you are organizing your LBC program around the organization's annual conference.

Ideally, the remaining committee members would reflect every type of library present in your state: special, academic, school, government, and public. Each of these members will have the ability to post messages to exclusive listservs and will be able to encourage participation from their colleagues.

### 4. Getting buy-in from librarians

We know librarians are busy people. Many of us already volunteer, though not all of our volunteering is skills-based. And, while most of us realize advocacy is important, the link between volunteering and increased funding may seem a little abstract, when it's time to actually sign up to volunteer. Whether you're seeking career exploration, professional development, personal growth, health promotion, or a social outlet, there's a benefit to volunteering for you.

It's important to realize that volunteering **does not** have to be a long-term commitment, or even a very significant time investment. Even a couple of hours, once a year, will benefit you socially and professionally, will garner good-will in your community, and will improve your community's understanding of your expertise and value.

Nor does volunteering have to be a slog. As we hope the [LBC Facebook page](#) shows, volunteering can be both fun and energizing—and your local committee will do their best to find excellent volunteer opportunities for you, that you will enjoy.

### 5. Reaching out to community organizations

The person on your committee who lives in the community where you'll be volunteering may have some good ideas about places to start; they may even be able to build on some existing partnerships. If not, we recommend contacting your local [United Way](#) to see if

you can get a list of all of the non-profits in your area. If the United Way does not have such a list for your location, you can work with other community service organizations, such as the [Rotary](#), [AARP](#), and [Lions Club](#), to generate the list.

Look through your list to see if any organizations appeal to you and seem likely to want volunteers with library skills (teaching, cataloging, organizing, creating programs, processing/preservation, technology, etc. are pretty far-reaching skills; *most* organizations could use at least one of these!). If so, contact the group by writing them an email or a letter. You can even use one of our template letters, or, if you have one that you'd be willing to share, let us know in a comment or by [emailing us!](#)

## 6. Creating the website

Your chapter/state/city is going to want some kind of localized information page, to show to both librarians and to prospective community organization partners. A wiki or Google Site would work well, to keep information organized and easily shared among the various parties involved in your LBC program. It does not need to be complicated, though features like [Google forms](#) for volunteer sign-up could be utilized.

[Here is an example wiki page](#), which you can use for ideas.

## 7. Choosing the date(s)

We recommend planning LBC to coincide with your state's/region's annual conference, if at all possible. However, it is more important to have sufficient lead time. We recommend that you begin planning your LBC day at least six months before it will happen; if you want to get started this year, but your conference is too soon, perhaps it is better to start in another city, to allow enough time for planning, finding potential community organizations to partner with, finding librarian volunteers, and sending out press releases to local news outlets, announcing the upcoming event.

## 8. Documenting your volunteering efforts

While you're out doing volunteer projects with local organizations, please be sure to take photographs, and ask volunteers to write up their thoughts and experiences for the [LBC Facebook page](#). If the organizations you're working with would be willing to share their thoughts, we'd love to have those, as well. And, of course, if you'd like to blog about

your experience *organizing* an LBC program, we'd also love for you to write about that, along with how many volunteers you had, what they did, what went well, and what you learned.

We really hope that everyone doing LBC, or really any library-skills-based volunteering, will blog about their thoughts, with photographs, so that we can share it with the wider community!

*We had to remove the post submission form, but email [librariansbuildcommunitiesEL@gmail.com](mailto:librariansbuildcommunitiesEL@gmail.com) with any post you'd like to add, and we'll happily post it for you! Thanks!*

*Please be sure to Like and Follow our social media accounts highlighted below!*

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